

## The Seal of Biliteracy, Graduates with Global Competence, is on the Rise

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### Abstract

The Seal of Biliteracy is an official state award that recognizes high school seniors who graduate with demonstrated proficiency in English and one or more other world languages. The policies and practices that support the Seal of Biliteracy promote twenty-first century skills and intercultural communication competencies that are critical in today's global society. The Seal of Biliteracy policies thus help improve high school graduation rates, and in some states, such as New York, these policies include specific language addressing the particular needs of English Learners<sup>1</sup> (ELs) to increase the graduation rate among this group. This article documents the journey of a high school and the experiences of a group of World Language teachers<sup>2</sup> during the 2016-17 school year, the first year of implementation of the New York State Seal of Biliteracy (NYSSB). We show that the initial voluntary participation of schools in this program was the result of the leadership of World Language teachers. These teachers knew their students well and made sure they understood that graduating with the Seal of Biliteracy would broaden their college and career opportunities. We illustrate how the teachers strengthened their thematic units in response to the State's language proficiency criteria and engaged students in goal setting and performance tasks that connected real-world situations with language learning toward the successful

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completion of the NYSSB requirements. We also show that schools need to establish school wide systems, such as strategic programming to foster ongoing collaboration among teachers and guidance counselors if they are committed to increasing the number of students who graduate with the NYSSB, particularly the number of students who are new to the English language but already speak one or more other world languages. Examples from other states and the lessons learned since its initial implementation in 2016 including the recent changes in the NY State Accountability system suggest a possible shift in how schools may perceive the NYSSB and therefore, embrace this voluntary program as a path to improving student achievement and increasing the graduation rate for all students.

## Introduction

There are approximately 350 languages spoken in U.S. homes, and there are at least 192 languages spoken in New York State (American Community Survey, 2015). Despite this fact, bilingual competency in the United States is rarely recognized as a personal or professional asset. For example, in 2015 and 2016, the New York State Education Department, recognizing the importance of fostering students' interests, approved several academically rigorous pathways to graduation. Students can choose to meet their graduation requirements through six pathways: (1) Arts, (2) Career & Technical Studies, (3) Career Development & Occupational Studies, (4) Humanities, (5) Science & Technology or (6) Languages Other than English (LOTE). In 2018, of a cohort of 169,321 students, less than 1% of English-speaking students chose LOTE as their pathway to graduation, and among ELs only 2% (NYS Demographics, 2018).

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**The Seal of Biliteracy** California was the first state to enact legislature to implement a seal of biliteracy program in 2011. In New York, the Seal of Biliteracy (NYSSB) laws<sup>3</sup> were established in September 2012, but the program was not fully implemented until the spring of 2016 (NYSED, 2018). Since 2011, students in more than 36 states can graduate with an award that recognizes their proficiency in English and one or more other world languages. The rapid pace in which states are enacting legislation regarding the Seal of Biliteracy is beginning to change the monolingual norm prevalent in the United States (Heineke, Davin & Bedford, 2018). The adoption of the seal in many states reflects the changes in 21<sup>st</sup>-century society and its impact on today's education. In New York State, the enactment of the NYSSB is part of the Next Generation P-12 Learning Standards framework, released last year as a result of a comprehensive review of the NYS Common Core Standards (NYSED, 2017). This new framework embraces a vision of 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy described as, "The skills and competencies that enable communication in increasingly diverse ways and promote the understanding and use of text for a variety of purposes." (Lesaux, 2017). This definition aligns

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with the international PISA 2018 Global Competence Framework developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation (OECD, 2019). Global competence (GC) “is a multidimensional, life-long learning goal. Global competent individuals can examine local, global and intercultural issues, understand and appreciate different perspectives and worldview, interact successfully and respectfully with others, and take responsible action toward sustainability and collective well-being.” (OECD, 2019, p.116). The importance of this new vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy and Global competence framework is to prepare our students for fulfilling personal and professional lives while responding to the demands of a job market where bilingual/bicultural professionals are highly sought out candidates (Brett, 2019).

The state Seal of Biliteracy laws recommend but do not mandate the implementation of the program, thus many states have established incentives to encourage the voluntary participation of their schools. The state Seal of Biliteracy laws recommend but do not mandate the implementation of the program, thus many states have established incentives to encourage the voluntary participation of their schools. For example, the state of Illinois offers college-level credit to students graduating with the seal (Heineke et al., 2018) and New York State has included measures to give credit to schools that graduate students with the NYSSB according to the recently approved State Accountability System (NYSED, 2019) under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).<sup>4</sup> Despite its being voluntary, the participation of school districts in the program continues to increase. Last year, the California Department of Education reported that a record number of 55,000 students had graduated with the seal of biliteracy in the school year 2017-18 (2019), and in New York State, over 3,300 students earned the NYSSB in 46 languages, its second year of implementation (Black, 2019).

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***The NYSSB criteria and its explicit policy related to English Language Learners (ELLs).*** The NYSSB is an award available to all graduating seniors who pass the mandated NYS Regents<sup>5</sup> exams and demonstrate proficiency in English and one or more other world languages. The intent of the NYSSB regulations is to encourage the study of languages and prepare students with twenty-first century skills while recognizing the significance of home language instruction and affirming the value of diversity. The NYSSB sets the level of proficiency in the World Language(s) at the Intermediate-High level of proficiency based on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, 2017), and includes a menu of criteria on how students can meet these expectations with explicit considerations for ELLs (Figure 1). To that end, the NYSSB does not mandate a particular curriculum or methodology; rather it gives districts flexibility to ensure that students of all languages, including those who speak a low-incidence language, have the opportunity to demonstrate Intermediate-High level of competency in their home language. The NYSSB

**Earning the New York State Seal of Biliteracy**

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A. Students wishing to receive the New York State (NYS) Seal of Biliteracy must complete all requirements for graduating with a NYS Regents diploma\*;  
 B. In addition to the above minimum requirement, students wishing to receive a NYS Seal of Biliteracy must earn **three (3) points** in each of the **two (2) areas** listed below.

Criteria for Demonstrating Proficiency in English	Point Value	Criteria for Demonstrating Proficiency in a World Language	Point Value
Score 75 or higher on the NYS Comprehensive English Regents Examination or score 80 or higher on the NYS Regents Examination in English Language Arts (Common Core)* or English Language Learners (ELLs) score 75 or above on two Regents exams other than English, without translation.	1	Complete a Checkpoint C level World Language course, with a grade of 85 or higher, or a comparable score using another scoring system set by the district and approved by the Commissioner, for both the coursework and final examination consistent with Checkpoint C standards.	1
ELLs score at the Commanding level on two modalities on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT).	1	Provide transcripts from a school in a country outside of the U.S. showing at least three years of instruction in the student's home/native language in Grade 8 or beyond, with an equivalent grade average of B or higher.	1
Complete all 11 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup> grade ELA courses with an average of 85 or higher or a comparable score using another scoring system set by the district and approved by the Commissioner.	1	For students enrolled in a Bilingual Education program, complete all required Home Language Arts (HLA) coursework and the district HLA exam with an 85 or higher or a comparable score using another scoring system set by the district and approved by the Commissioner.	1
Achieve the following scores on the examinations listed below: -3 or higher on an Advanced Placement (AP) English Language or English Literature examination, or -80 or higher on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).	1	Score at a proficient level on an accredited Checkpoint C World Language assessment (See "Checkpoint C World Language Assessments and Minimum Scores" on the following page.)	1
Present a culminating project, scholarly essay or portfolio that meets the criteria for speaking, listening, reading, and writing established by the district's NYS Seal of Biliteracy Committee to a panel of reviewers with proficiency in English.	2	Present a culminating project, scholarly essay, or portfolio that meets the criteria for speaking, listening, reading, and writing established by the district's NYS Seal of Biliteracy Committee and that is aligned to the NYS Checkpoint C Learning Standards to a panel of reviewers with proficiency in the target language.	2

**Figure 1.** New York State Seal of Biliteracy criteria (NYSSB Handbook, 2018, p. 12)

Handbook guidelines (NYSED, 2018) include opportunities for students to produce portfolios, culminating projects, and/or scholarly essays in both English and in a world language. In schools with bilingual programs, students can submit completed Home Language Arts coursework with a score of 85 or higher to earn one credit. The NYSSB regulations also encourage students who recently arrived in the United States to graduate with the NYSSB; if the transcripts from a school in a foreign country demonstrate three years of instruction in the student's home/native language at grade 8 or beyond, he/she can receive one credit toward meeting the NYSSB requirements.

In addition, the NYSSB regulations include language that encourages ELLs in their study of English as a new language. More specifically, in New York State, ELLs must take a yearly exam to measure their progress in the acquisition of English. This test, the New York State Test of English as a Second Language or NYSESLAT, measures students' progress in five developmental stages: Entering, Emerging, Transitioning, Expanding, and Commanding. Students scoring at the Commanding level on the NYSESLAT are no longer classified as ELs and can receive one point toward the three points they need to meet the criteria for the Seal of Biliteracy.

The Seal of Biliteracy Committee (SBC), evaluates the student culminating projects. The SBC is responsible for supporting the students throughout the process, keeping documentation of the work produced by the students, and evaluating their projects (NYSED, 2018).

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### Embracing the NY State Seal of Biliteracy (NYSSB): A High School Case Study

#### *The Foreign Languages<sup>6</sup> Department proactively recruits student candidates.*

In the fall of 2016, the New York State Education Department launched the full implementation of the NYS Seal of Biliteracy program (NYSSB). In one of the urban high schools where one of the authors provides professional development and coaching, the Foreign Language (FL) department embraced the opportunity from the very beginning. The FL teachers met with their school supervisor who recognized what the NYSSB could represent to many of the school's 732 students<sup>7</sup>, and thus supported the teachers' initiative. To that end, the school began the administrative process and signed up for voluntary participation in the NYSSB.

The FL teachers carefully considered the criteria students had to meet to graduate with the NYSSB and realized that because the school was already in session and the process was new to all parties involved, it would be difficult to make some critical language programming changes. Consequently, they made the strategic decision to select students who were on a solid path to graduation and taking Advanced Placement (AP) language courses. At the same time, the teachers and the administration agreed to disseminate the information to all the students and begin recruiting 9<sup>th</sup> and/or 10<sup>th</sup> graders with the goal of increasing the number of candidates to the NYSSB in the following years. Teachers distributed a student-friendly informational flyer with an overview of the initiative and the list of requirements (Figure #1, above), and invited a guest speaker to meet with the AP students. During the presentation, students engaged in discussion about the intent of the law in New York and other states, the process to meet the language proficiency criteria, and the advantages of the Seal of Biliteracy on their official transcript would represent to college admission officers and prospective employers. The discussion session, together with the written information, helped students understand that the benefits of graduating with the NYSSB would continue beyond their high school years. Students were also reassured that the school would make every effort to support their hard work and help them overcome language and academic challenges toward the successful completion of all the requirements.

By the end of this initial phase, the FL department had identified a group of 10 students that included five ELL students, two of whom might have become Long-Term English Language Learners (LTELLs<sup>8</sup>). In addition, the Spanish FL teacher opted to include two or three recent arrivals. These students were juniors with a positive academic attitude and who, according to the transcripts from their countries of origin, had attended school and had at least an eighth-grade or equivalent literacy level in their home language. The school had also formed the SBC to document all the student activities related to the NYSSB and meet submission deadlines as given by the district.

***Student candidates self-assess and set goals.*** The candidates, who were taking AP Spanish or AP Italian, studied the criteria for demonstrating proficiency in the World Language of their choice and opted to present a culminating project to meet the criteria for speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The NY State Education Department gives districts latitude with regard to the type and theme

of the project (NYSED, 2018). Therefore, the school followed the guidelines of the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE). According to the guidelines distributed internally via a weekly newsletter disseminated by Central office, student-candidates to the NYSSB had to make an oral presentation of their culminating project to a panel of reviewers with expertise and/or proficiency in the target language, during a particular week at the end of May.

In order to engage students in the process, teachers helped them set clear and concrete goals. In the AP Spanish class, students reviewed and discussed the Can-Do Statements for the target level of proficiency at Intermediate-High and compared them to the statements at the Intermediate-Mid and Advanced-Low levels (ACTFL, 2017), with a focus on Presentational Writing (Figure 2). Subsequently, students reviewed and discussed the other competencies: Interpersonal Communication, Presentational Speaking, Presentational Writing, Interpretive Listening, and Interpretive Reading.

Presentational Writing What are my strengths?	Performance Rubric: Use these statements to guide your self-reflection, What can I do?	Target Performance Level: Intermediate High, What are my goals?
<b>VOCABULARY</b> How rich and varied is my vocabulary?		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can use vocabulary from topics of personal interest, literature and current events.</li> <li>• I often use practiced structures and past, present and future time words accurately on familiar topics, or in prepared presentations.</li> </ul>	
<b>QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION – ORGANIZATION &amp; LEVEL OF LANGUAGE</b> How well do I communicate?		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My writing is organized and has good cohesion. My sentence complexity is appropriate for this level.</li> <li>• I can begin to develop a topic, often using paragraph style speech and references to authentic resources</li> <li>• I can clarify meaning by paraphrasing, rephrasing or circumlocution. I may be able to self-edit or self-correct.</li> </ul>	
<b>INTERCULTURALITY – INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE</b> Do I show intercultural understanding?		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My language shows intercultural knowledge or understanding for this task.</li> <li>• I can begin to explain perspectives (family or cultural values) by comparing familiar products and practices (social norms, celebrations) in my own and other cultures.</li> </ul>	

Figure 2. Self-Assessment & Goal Setting

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The teacher introduced and modeled this self-assessment and gave students time to review and ask clarifying questions about its purpose and how and where to write their answers. Afterwards, students discussed their answers and goals with a partner, and a few volunteers shared their overall self-reflection experience with the larger group.

### ***Students develop higher levels of language proficiency through thematic units.***

Both the AP Spanish and AP Italian teachers had carefully revised their thematic units to support the progress of their students to achieve the criteria required for the NYSSB. They selected thematic units that would activate students' background knowledge and topics that all students could relate to, thereby motivating them to learn and practice the target language while reading, exploring, investigating, and discussing issues of their interest. One example is the thematic unit entitled "Building a Better World – *Construyendo un mundo mejor*" (Figure 3, next page).

Here the students immersed themselves in the lives of Spanish-speaking communities of Central and South America through carefully - selected videos that addressed challenging social problems and the actions carried out by young people determined to make a positive difference in their communities. Students would engage in animated discussions about the pain that the explosion of landmines created in Columbia and the courage of the singer-songwriter and peace ambassador Juanes who "launched a foundation with the goal to help victims transcend and become active agents working for peace" (Fundación Mi Sangre, 2017). The class viewed one of the videos in three stages. The first viewing of the video included English subtitles, and the goal was to ensure that all the students understood the main idea, while practicing topic specific vocabulary. Following the viewing, there was a whole-class discussion guided by open-ended questions that had students reflect on how the "Fundación Mi Sangre" uses art and games to nurture the leadership of young people who become problem solvers and peacebuilders in their local communities. This first time, the teacher accepted questions and comments in English when that helped the students better negotiate the meaning of a word or an expression, and/or to ask for clarification. Before the second viewing, students reviewed the ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Interpretive Listening and Presentational Writing (ACTFL, 2017) and prepared to take notes in the target language. Following the second viewing, students had ample time to review their notes with the support of the Can-Do Statements. The AP Spanish teacher moved about the classroom providing individual support and clarifying questions. Before the third viewing, the teacher presented several questions and prompts to offer opportunities to practice the target language and deepen students' intercultural understanding.

The purpose of the third and last viewing of the video clip from the "Fundación Mi Sangre" was for the students to review their notes for accuracy and to add details. Later, students would use these notes and those they had taken during the previous whole class discussions and conversations with a partner to prepare a written draft for their culminating projects. To that end, the AP Spanish teacher dedicated a few class periods to the study and practice of Hochman's Multiple Paragraph Outline (MPO) strategy (2015), which provided students with several

<b>Building a Better World – Construyendo un Mundo Mejor: Unit Overview</b> Within a real world context, this unit focuses on the challenges facing today's society and how students can become part of the solution(s). More specifically, students study, research and discuss a leadership development project aimed at helping young people become key builders of their local communities.			
Essential Questions	Language Tasks & Instruction	Communicative Mode	Summative Performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>What are the challenges faced by the Columbian society? How do they reflect the social, political and environmental challenges facing today's society?</i></li> <li><i>What are the causes?</i></li> <li><i>What are the solutions presented by the "Fundación Mi Sangre"? How can you be part of the solution (s) of the challenges facing today's society?</i></li> </ul>	<p>Can-Do Statements from Intermediate Mid to Intermediate High (NYSSB criteria)</p> <p>Students watch a theme-related video, i.e. the youth leadership program of the "Fundación Mi Sangre". They watch it in three steps. First, to get the gist (video with English sub-titles). Second, to take notes in the target language, and third, to review their notes and add details.</p> <p>Students share and discuss with a partner their understanding of the youth leadership project.</p> <p>Students use the Multiple Paragraph Outlines (MPO) strategy to organize their notes and write a multi-paragraph draft of their Capstone project, guided by the Can-Do Statements.</p>	<p>Interpretive listening</p> <p>Interpretive speaking</p> <p>Interpretive speaking</p> <p>Interpretive listening</p> <p>Interpretive reading</p> <p>Interpretive writing</p>	<p>Presentational</p> <p>Intermediate High (NYSSB criteria)</p> <p>NYSSB Culminating project (The Capstone Project)</p> <p>Students create and a 3-5 minute power-point presentation about the challenges facing today's society, its causes and possible solution (s), including how they can contribute to resolving them.</p> <p>This is an oral presentation to an audience that will include their classmates and a panel that will evaluate the presentation with the purpose of granting to the student-presenters the NYSSB.</p>

Figure 3. Overview of Thematic Unit

levels of scaffolding and various access points into the writing of their draft for the culminating NYSSB project.

The Multiple Paragraph Outline (MPO) is a strategy used school-wide to improve students' expository writing. The Hochman method, or MPO strategy, provides a systematic approach to writing with a set of instructional guidelines and templates aimed at helping students organize their notes from effective sentences

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to multi-paragraph compositions. Through this organizational strategy, students express their ideas in writing more clearly, therefore improving the overall quality of their compositions. In the AP Spanish class, the MPO strategy guided students through the writing process in the target language. The teacher illustrated how to use the MPO template (Figure 4) with a parallel topic as example. She discussed how students could improve their school community—*mejorar mi comunidad escolar*—using the MPO strategy to write a thesis statement and organize a set of notes into a multi-paragraph composition. At the same time, she sought students’ ideas and vocabulary, and reinforced the MPO steps to writing. She also emphasized that the power of this writing technique was that they could use it when writing in other classes. The teacher then showed how they could use the MPO strategy to write a paragraph explaining how they solved a problem in algebra, or to write a hypothesis for a science experiment. Students then re-worked the example created in collaboration with the teacher to practice the MPO strategy on their own. Once the class demonstrated confidence using the strategy, students returned to the notes they had taken while watching the video clip and used the MPO to compose the first draft of their NYSSB culminating project.

Multiple Paragraph Outline		Name: _____
Topic: _____		
Thesis Statement: _____		
_____		
Main Ideas	Details (in note form)	
1st ¶- Introduction	GS: ..... SS: ..... Th.St.: .....	
2nd ¶- Topic becomes TS	..... ..... .....	
3rd ¶- Topic becomes TS	..... ..... .....	
4th ¶- Topic becomes TS	..... ..... .....	
5th ¶- Conclusion	Th. St. (rephrased): ..... SS (new): ..... GS (new): .....	

Figure 4. Multiple Paragraph Outline

## **Students Develop their NYSSB Project & Prepare their Presentation**

The ensuing weeks were very busy for the students; they researched their topic, refined their compositions, and used them to create the talking points for a PowerPoint presentation. The students knew that they had to earn three points to meet the NYSSB criteria (Figure # 1 above) and were confident about scoring 85 or higher in the AP classes, which would earn them one point. Two former ELL students already had one point because they had scored Commanding on the NYSESLAT. The culminating project, however, had the highest value and they all worked hard to earn the two points assigned to it.

As stated above, NY State delegated to the school districts the decision(s) regarding topic, quality of content, quality of presentation, and the final decisions about whether a student had met the criteria. At the school level, the SBC was responsible for guaranteeing legitimacy and rigor in both the process and the culminating student projects.

The first year of the statewide implementation of the NYSSB, the NYC Department of Education (NYCDOE) developed district-wide guidelines to ensure the quality of the process and established specific deadlines for the timely submission of all required paperwork to the State. During this initial phase, however, there were no districtwide guidelines to assess the quality of the content and delivery of the NYSSB presentations based on the ACTFL proficiency levels. Recognizing this need, the AP Spanish teacher took upon herself the responsibility of researching how other states with a State Seal of Biliteracy were evaluating the quality of the students' work. She then developed a set of student-centered rubrics and a checklist for the SBC and judging panel and submitted them to the NYC District office for approval. The rubrics developed by the school's AP Spanish teacher (Figure 5, next page) became the district's prototype for the student NYSSB culminating projects, which the NYCDOE renamed NYSSB Capstone project rubrics. Today, these are the rubrics used in all NYC schools participating in the NYSSB program.

*Students deliver their NYSSB projects in front of an audience.* The Presentational mode of communication at the Intermediate-High level of proficiency requires rigorous study and preparation. This proficiency goal combined with the fact that students were to present in front of their classmates and respond to a panel of judges, made the NYSSB project presentations a very challenging multi-modal task for all of them. Working with a partner or in groups of three, students researched the material that they had collected and made preliminary decisions on what they wanted to include in their slides and what they would say when delivering the presentation orally. They checked their word selection to be sure that their vocabulary was clear, rich, and accurate. Then, two weeks before the presentations, both the AP Spanish and AP Italian teachers met with each student individually and helped them prepare their final presentations using the compositions they had written previously using the MPO strategy. Students rehearsed their presentations in small groups and practiced listening and responding to questions with clarity and following the Can-Do Statements for the

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Seal of Biliteracy Culminating Project			
Student Name: _____		World Language: _____	
Project Summary: _____			
	INTERMEDIATE MID	INTERMEDIATE HIGH	ADVANCED LOW
INTERPRETIVE READING <i>What did I read to learn about my topic?</i>	To prepare my project, I researched my topic, and made a list of key ideas related to it.	To prepare my project, I researched my topic. I gathered ideas from stories and texts that included descriptions of events and experiences related to my topic.	To prepare my project, I researched my topic. I gathered ideas from stories and texts from different genres that included descriptions of events and experiences related to my topic.
PRESENTATIONAL WRITING <i>How did I write about the topic for my presentation?</i>	To present my project to an audience, I have written my ideas in complete and connected sentences.	To present my project to an audience, I have first organized all my ideas and events in sequence. Then, I have explained each idea or event in short paragraphs and/or connected sentences.	To present my project to an audience, I have first organized all my ideas and events in sequence. Then, I have explained each idea or event in short paragraphs and/or connected sentences. In addition, I have made sure to include academic language and technical words related to the topic.
PRESENTATIONAL SPEAKING <i>How did I use what I wrote during my presentation?</i>	When I make my presentation, I read the sentences I have written on the slides and/or charts.	When I make my presentation, I talk about my topic confidently, and read what I have written when I want to put emphasis on a particular ideas or events.	When I make my presentation, I talk about my topic confidently, and rarely need to read what I have written. When I want to put emphasis on a particular ideas or events, I use my own words.

**Figure 5.** New York City rubrics to evaluate the culminating project, aka Capstone Project.

Intermediate-High level of proficiency. The process of preparing and creating the presentations for the NYSSB was a collaborative effort, but the final product was an independent presentation.

On the day of the presentation, students were nervous, as were their teachers. They thought that their students would become tense and not know what to do. Fortunately, after introducing themselves to the audience, the students relaxed; they felt very comfortable with their topic and they all impressed the panel of judges and received satisfactory to exceptional scores.

### World Language Teachers Share Practices and Learn from One Another

As an external facilitator, I provided on-site school support to teachers in the NYSSB process in several NYC schools, but the number of teachers who were reaching out asking for guidance and support was growing rapidly. Thus, it was time to bring them together so that they could share best practices and learn from each other. There were two professional learning sessions<sup>9</sup> during the 2016-17 school year, and the participation of teachers met the maximum capacity of 40 participants each time. The sessions, designed within the framework of a Professional Learning Community (DuFour, 2004), aimed at enabling teachers to discuss and exchange language instructional practices and experiences regarding the NYSSB requirements in a collaborative and welcoming culture. Teachers discussed the necessary components of a rigorous program aimed at preparing high school students to graduate with the Seal of Biliteracy, and identified the following as key instructional features:

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1. Knowing the students and setting performance goals with self-assessment;
2. Designing meaningful thematic units that connect ideas with language learning;
3. Articulating strategies that students could apply to learning world languages and other subjects.

### ***(1) Knowing the students and setting performance goals with self-assessment.***

The NYSSB policies require that all students demonstrate proficiency in English and one or more other world languages, but it does not mandate any particular curriculum in order to extend this opportunity to as many students as possible. Hence, these teachers agreed that it was very important to work collaboratively with the Guidance Department, English as a New Language (ENL) teachers, and Bilingual teachers in order to provide individual support to all potential candidates. Reciprocally, students should be well-informed about the Seal of Biliteracy. According to a study that involved surveys and discussion groups with high school seniors (Heineke et al., 2018), all students valued bilingual competence as an asset and recognized the value of graduating with the Seal of Biliteracy as a gateway to many opportunities after graduation. In the study, English-dominant students appeared confident in meeting the requirements and were able to articulate how to earn the Seal of Biliteracy, whereas linguistically diverse students<sup>10</sup> reported a lack of information about how to earn the Seal of Biliteracy at nearly double the rate of their English-dominant classmates.

In the first professional teacher meeting, the AP Spanish teacher shared the Student Self –assessment and Goal-setting protocol that she used with her class (Figure 2, above). In addition, the group discussed the value of writing SMART goals, that is statements that express student and/or professional goals in measurable terms. The acronym SMART stands for goal statements that are Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic and Timely (University of California, 2017).

In the World Language class, SMART goals usually describe how a student will carry out a particular project or a task. For example, “*Today (T), I am going to give a 5-minute presentation (M) on my research project toward meeting the requirements for the NYSSB (A) comparing the work of two foundations (S) committed to improve their own local communities (R).*”

Goals set direction and can drive student motivation, particularly if they include assessment measures such as rubrics, that allow students to reflect on their progress toward meeting the established goals. To that end and during our first session, participating teachers engaged in a hands-on activity aimed at developing a set of rubrics for a communicative task that they were to perform at the Intermediate-High proficiency level (ACTFL, 2017). Teachers formed groups based on the World Language they taught and prepared for this task:

Today you have a purchasing dilemma. You are in a music store and want to buy a CD. To that purpose, you will listen to a few short segments from different CDs<sup>11</sup>. As you listen, please take notes about how the music makes you feel, what you like about each of the pieces and the

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reasons why you may want to buy a particular CD. To help you decide, you will seek the opinion of your task-partner. But first, and to support you throughout this task, we will develop a set of rubrics. (In the World Language classroom, the teacher writes the task in the target language).

Based on the Can-Do Statements, the facilitator wrote the expectations for the task on a large chart paper<sup>12</sup>, and led a group discussion to ensure that the expectations were clearly written and student-friendly (in a WL classroom, a teacher might opt to add English sub-titles). As the group reviewed the final expectations, the facilitator wrote them onto a rubric template that was projected on a screen under the “Meets Expectations” heading, and in cells that aligned to a set of guiding prompts (Figure 6). Once teachers reviewed how the Intermediate-High statements aligned to the prompts, they brainstormed how they could proceed to write the statements corresponding to Approaching Expectations–Intermediate-Low, and Intermediate-Mid, and Exceeding Expectations–Advanced-Low. Then each group divided up the task and completed the rubrics. The written expectations of the groups were entered onto the rubric template. After a brief discussion of the differences between the various levels of proficiency and how they were articulated in the rubric, the group readied for the task.

What do I need to do?	Approaches Expectations		Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
	Intermediate-Low	Intermediate-Mid	Intermediate-High	Advanced-Low
Listen and take notes			I wrote phrases and complete sentences while listening to the music.	
Review my notes			I used my phrases and sentences to write one (1) paragraph, and at least three (3) questions for my partner.	
Share my plan with a partner			My partner and I listened to each other and exchanged ideas that help me make a decision on what to buy.	
Learn and use new vocabulary			By actively listening, I learned at least three (3) new words, and used them during the task.	
How well did I do on this task?			We listened to each other with respect; paraphrased what they other said and then extended each other ideas	

**Figure 6.** Developing Student-centered Rubrics for a Communicative Task

The teachers used the rubrics while listening to the music and taking notes and when discussing their notes with a partner in order to make their purchasing decisions. They also used the rubrics to reflect on how well they performed the task. By immersing themselves in the development of a task-specific rubric, teachers said that they gained a better insight about the role of the students in creating a self-assessment based on the Can-Do statements. The group also shared ideas on how they could use rubrics to support other communicative tasks and shared steps they would take to implement the rubric-writing process in their classrooms.

**(2) Designing meaningful thematic units that connect ideas with language learning.** The AP Spanish teacher shared with her colleagues how she had aligned

a thematic unit to the criteria of the NYSSB. The group agreed that thematic units help create real-world learning contexts that can engage students in meaningful conversations that stimulate the use of the new vocabulary and expressions, thus accelerating the acquisition of the target language. There were, however, some concerns about how to create tasks with multiple-entry points to address different levels of proficiency and intercultural competence among students. To that purpose, the AP Spanish teacher who was the group facilitator, presented the MPO technique and showed how they could use the strategy to incorporate the NCSSFL/ACTFL Can-Do Statements into a thematic unit and create differentiated tasks.

**(3) Articulating strategies that students can apply to learn world languages and other subjects.** Teachers expressed a desire to expand their instructional toolbox with research-based language-content learning strategies. Therefore, during the second professional development session, we facilitated training on the implementation of the Picture Word Inductive Model (PWIM). The PWIM is a technique that uses familiar pictures rich in content to elicit words from students' listening and speaking repertoire and support the transition from oral language to the written word (Calhoun, 1988). Calhoun created this technique or strategy to teach reading and writing to young children, but it also an effective technique to develop a new language because it activates students' schema and uses them to develop vocabulary and oral proficiency while fostering mastery of the written text, including conventions and grammar. The implementation of the PWIM technique requires a specific set of steps, introduced in the following sequence: (1) label, (2) classify, (3) describe and (4) connect.

In order to give teachers a fuller experience with the PWIM, they engaged in the hands-on activity described below in which the facilitator also incorporated a short video clip. Teachers grouped themselves by World Languages and used their language for this task. The performance task aimed at drawing from teachers' background and language knowledge to write a composition in the target language.



Figure 7. Step 1. Label what you see in the picture.

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To that end, we used the four steps of the PWIM:

1. Label. *What do you see in the picture?* We had prepared a composite picture using three frames from a short video created by a 15-year-old at a Libyan workshop run by UNICEF (Abdullah, 2013). Working in small groups, teachers labeled everything they saw in the picture using as many vocabulary words as they could. They were encouraged to label objects, actions, colors, shapes, and anything they could name. Together they read, reviewed the words, and added new ones. Then, teachers considered the three pictures as a whole and gave it a title (Figure 7, example).
2. Classify. *How can you classify these words?* In their small groups, teachers looked for commonalities among the words and grouped them, such as “colors,” “shapes,” “nouns”. At this point, the group watched the one-minute video; they saw children playing soccer and heard them speak Arabic, a language that most of them did not understand. They also heard the voice of the English-speaking narrator and learned that the dream of the boy at the goal post was to become a professional soccer player. The viewing of this very short video clip helped generate rich and varied words that teachers added to their existing lists. Teachers transcribed their new words; some groups even wrote words that connected the three frames of the composite picture. In the World Language classroom, some teachers prefer to provide their students with a template and criteria to support the classification of words. In this case, it is advisable to include “other” as one of the criteria to ensure that students can incorporate all of their words (Figure 8, example).

Nouns	Adjectives	Verbs	Other
<i>dibujos</i>	<i>rojo</i>	<i>jugar</i>	
<i>graffiti</i>	<i>azul</i>	<i>patear</i>	
<i>balón</i>	<i>negro</i>	<i>chutar</i>	
<i>porteria</i>	<i>grande</i>	<i>agarrar</i>	
<i>portero</i>	<i>pequeña</i>	<i>mirar</i>	
<i>muchachos</i>	<i>soleado</i>		
<i>campo de juego</i>			
<i>pantalón</i>			
<i>día</i>			

**Figure 8.** Step 2. Classify all the words you wrote around the picture.

3. Describe & Generate Sentences. *What is happening in the picture?* This prompt made teachers “think” and/or “imagine” not only what they saw the boys doing on the picture but go deeper. Teachers asked each other many questions, including, “Who are these boys? Where are they? Why is soccer so important to them?” They were thoroughly immersed in the process and as they talked, shared ideas and laughed at given suggestions, they wrote many sentences (Figure 9, example, next page).

The process in the classroom is no different; by step 3, students not only talk about what they see but enjoy challenging each other with creative possibilities. The

- *Hay unos muchachos jugando al fútbol.*
- *No hay ninguna muchacha.*
- *Hay una portería pequeña y otra grande.*
- *Hay dos porteros.*
- *En la última foto, el portero agarra el balón.*
- *Hay dibujos, o letras que parecen grafiti en la pared.*
- *Es un día de sol.*
- *Los muchachos parecen amigos.*
- *Escucho que hablan un idioma que no conozco.*
- *Tal vez hablan en árabe, o otro idioma.*
- *Uno de ellos sueña que será un jugador profesional.*
- ...

Figure 9. Step 3. Describe what you see; use complete sentences.

Los muchachos están jugando al fútbol en un campo de juego, y lo pasan muy bien. En las paredes que rodean el campo se ve grafiti.

Cuando miro el video, oigo que los muchachos hablan una lengua que no conozco. También veo que uno de los muchachos está listo para patear el balón y el otro que hace de portero, está listo para cogerlo.

En la última foto, que tiene un fondo azul como si fuera un sitio irreal, yo veo al portero enfocándose en el balón y sudando. Por último, se le ve cogiendo el balón, triunfante. Pienso que el muchacho quiere ser un futbolista profesional.

The boys are playing football on a playground, and have a great time. On the walls surrounding the field you can see graffiti. Listening to the video, the boys speak a language I do not know. One of the boys is ready to kick the ball and the other who is the goalkeeper, is ready to catch it. In the last photo, which has a blue background as if it were an unreal place, I see the goalkeeper focusing on the ball and sweating. Finally he is seen catching the ball, triumphant. I think that the boy wants to be a professional soccer player.

Figure 10. Step 4. Connect words and sentences to write one or more paragraphs.

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PWIM helps create a safe environment to freely speak and practice new words in the target World Language.

4. **Connect.** By the time the teacher group reached step 4, they had a story to tell because of the many words and sentences readily available to write it. Teachers wrote from simple to complex narratives, all of them with a beginning, a middle and a closing statement (Figure 10, next page). It was rewarding to listen to teachers' stories in a variety of world languages. As a group, we created many stories in many languages, all of them originated from the same initial picture. During the group reflection, teachers saw the authentic text they had created—their story—as an entry point for individual (and differentiated) student compositions, and also as an opportunity to make real-life connections to continue building students' oral and written language skills. We also discussed how teachers could use the authentic text and ideas resulting from the PWIM process to identify a topic for a classroom debate. In this particular example, some of the topics included, "Do you think that soccer is a sport mostly for boys?" (Yes/No/Why), and "Do you think that children's dream become true? (Yes/No/Why).

In the World Language class, the PWIM brings together students at different levels of language proficiency and from different backgrounds. For example, an EL student studying his/her home language in the World Language class may be unfamiliar with the situation presented in the picture, but he /she would have no problem naming objects and actions depicted in it. On the other hand, an English-dominant student may have the background knowledge about what he/she sees in the picture but may have a limited vocabulary in the World Language. Hence, students can tap into each other's knowledge as they go through the PWIM steps. By the time they have to write a story, students generally have acquired enough vocabulary words and background knowledge to create an authentic text/composition. The latter was one of the most salient benefits mentioned by the teachers during the whole group discussion that followed the activity. Teachers saw the PWIM as an effective strategy to plan differentiated tasks and address the various levels of proficiency often present in the World Language classroom. Thus, the activity and the strategy introduced to the group helped address a primary concern that the group had identified during the first session.

In June 2017, the first cohort of seniors graduated with the NY State Seal of Biliteracy. In the high school described in this article, ten seniors received their NYSSB for their demonstrated proficiency in Italian or Spanish. During an interview with the AP Spanish teacher soon after the graduation of her students, she stated that students felt very proud of their accomplishments and that for some of them it validated "what they already knew, that knowing more than one language was an advantage and a tool for success in their future" (Salavert, 2017, p.10). She considered the program rather successful that first year, but she felt that in order to establish a more robust program, it would be necessary to work with guidance counselors and the school administration to establish individual student plans toward graduating with the NYSBB.

This first cohort also included students from many of the schools represented by the teachers who had participated in the professional learning sessions. In addition to Spanish, students received awards for their proficiency in French, Mandarin, Korean and other languages. As of June 2018, two years after its inception, more than 4,000 students had received the NYSSB in the State of New York. These students represented 80 countries and 46 languages (Black, 2019).

**Lessons Learned: *Where do we go from here?***

The accomplishments of the high school students described in this article were the direct result of the work of World Language teachers. These teachers understood the value of an award that recognized the bilingual competency of their students and proactively engaged their schools in the voluntary participation in the program and helped their students persevere toward meeting all the requirements. On graduation day, students received the NYSSB award in front of peers, parents, and teachers, and the entire school community celebrated the first cohort of NYSSB award recipients in the school of our case study.

The World Language teachers who participated in the professional development sessions became confident in the use of the NCCSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Benchmark Statements (2017) to strengthen their thematic units, create goals and assessments for their students, and develop differentiated tasks. But we also learned that their individual actions fell short in reaching out to potential candidates beyond those who were in their AP class rosters. As the AP Spanish teacher expressed in her reflection at the end of year one (Salavert, 2017), teachers need to work collaboratively with other teachers and guidance counselors to identify potential NYSSB candidates in grades 9 and 10, and create a graduation path that sets clear priorities and motivates students to graduate with the Seal of Bilingualism.

The New York State Seal of Bilingualism policies are framed broadly to include all students, but they also use specific language that ensures the participation of English Language Learners. In practice, the participation of ELLs in the NYSSB program includes mostly ELLs who have met Commanding in the NYSESLAT, as in the case of the high school described in this article. This may soon change, however, because of the New York State Accountability measures under ESSA, “The Every Student Succeeds Act.” The ESSA NY State Accountability System includes seven measures of academic success, and one of the *new* measures is based on the individual progress of ELL students on the NYSESLAT. That is, schools whose ELL students meet annual expected growth accrue credits toward their readiness for school success. This external incentive should prove very important to schools with a high percentage of ELL students. In addition, schools now receive extra credit for students who graduate with the NYSSB because they exhibit higher levels of readiness under the “College, Career, and Civic Readiness” (CCR) measure. Therefore, the success of ELL students who make progress on the NYSESLAT

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and receive the NYSSB should have positive influence on two or more of the six high school indicators that measure school success. A particular sub-group with potential NYSSB candidates is that of LTELLs. In general, students designated as LTELLs are fluent communicators but fall behind in their core subjects; they tend to “get stuck” at the transitioning or expanding levels of proficiency. A clear purpose, such as graduating with the NYSSB, together with a plan of study, might help these students return to a graduation path.

Examples from other states may also provide next steps. In 2017, the State of Illinois passed legislation that officially recognizes elementary and middle school students in language education programs including Bilingual, Dual Language, and World Language, who demonstrate bilingual proficiency and intercultural competences. More specifically, 5<sup>th</sup> graders who score at “Novice-Mid” in a world language assessment qualify for the elementary Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Seal of Biliteracy, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders who score “Intermediate Low” receive a middle school CPS Seal of Biliteracy award (Narvaez, 2017). Most recently, Mitchell (2019) reported that in the State of California, and as a result of ongoing advocacy, 63% of high school seniors in the class of 2018 “who earned the ‘seal of biliteracy’ spoke a language other than English when they began school. [...] Those youths, identified in the report as heritage-language students, include current English-learners, former English-learners reclassified as English proficient, and students identified as bilingual when they began school” (p.1).

The lessons learned since its initial implementation in 2016, and the changes in the NY State Accountability System suggest a possible shift in how schools may perceive the NYSSB and embrace it as a path toward enhancing student achievement and increasing the graduation rate for all students. The NYSBB enables all students to learn the value of speaking multiple languages in a journey of great effort and greater accomplishment.

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### Notes

1. The terms English Learners (ELs) and English Language Learners (ELLs) most frequently used in NYS, are applied interchangeably throughout the article.
2. The terms World Languages, Foreign Languages and LOTE are applied interchangeably throughout the article.

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3. NY Education Law section 815, subdivision (h) of section 100.5 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education.
4. In 2015, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) was reauthorized as amended by “The Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA). The statute was previously amended by the 2001 reauthorization, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).
5. The New York State (NYS) Regents Exams are a set of tests that students in the state of New York must pass in order to receive their high school diploma.
6. The school uses the nomenclature Foreign Language (FL) Department, and FL teachers.
7. 2017-18 student demographics: Asian:15%, Black:24%, Hispanic: 48%, White:11%, ELLs: 14% and Students with special needs: 24%
8. In 2016-17, there were 30,577 (11.3%) English Language Learners (ELLs) classified as Long-Term ELLs in NY State. LTELLs are students who have been enrolled in American schools for more than six years, who are not progressing as expected toward English proficiency.
9. The NYC Regional Bilingual Education Network (NYC RBE-RN) at Fordham University continues to offer professional development sessions for World Language teachers in the NYSSB and related topics.
10. Here the authors incorporate the nomenclature used by Heineke in her article: English-dominant and linguistically diverse students.
11. The authors used three short online videos featuring multicultural music.
12. Teachers usually write the rubric for a task in English, but if your students are ready, consider using the target language.

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