

In Pursuit of the Seal

By Crystal Luce, EL Teacher, Tipp City Schools



When the Ohio Seal of Bilingual Literacy initiative was released, I read through the qualifying information and shared it with our World Languages department. I documented information obtained from the 2018 Ohio TESOL Conference and the 2018 Ohio Heritage Language Summit. I heard from community business leaders about how the Seal would be beneficial in their pursuit of fully bilingual individuals. As the English Learner teacher in a small district that serves all grade levels at all buildings, I have the advantage of getting to know students as they progress through the program. So I immediately began a list of former EL students of mine who could qualify for the Seal for each graduating year.

I approached each of these students and asked if they would be interested. I informed them of the possibility of getting the Seal and what the qualification process would be. And I was delighted when each one of them expressed interest. But the fact that this Seal would benefit their future employers wasn't the driving point for them. It was the recognition: recognizing their heritage and the struggles they have endured to become fully literate in two languages.

In the pursuit of earning the Seal, be prepared to face challenges beyond meeting the immediate qualifications. For example, paying for the required fluency test (STAMP) was a hardship for my 2018 student. Feeling this was an unfair inhibitor of earning the Seal, I contacted our superintendent, assistant superintendent and the student's school principal and together, we found a way to secure funds to assist the student's family and allow him to take the test. While he found the assessment challenging, he was able to complete it. We received his scores within 24 hours—he had met the qualifications.

Soon after, our testing administrator entered the appropriate coding into the system and told me that ODE would provide the mechanism (badge) for the transcript and the diploma—a similar process to the Honors Diploma. I contacted his college and let them know he would be receiving this Seal on his final transcript.

Our district has shown recognition of our 2018 qualifying student's accomplishment via school announcements and our district newsletter. We also intend to share a presentation of the Seal at his graduation ceremony. I believe the Seal will continue to benefit this student as he enters college and the workforce. His completion of the requirements to prove competency in two languages will assure his college, as well as his future employers, that they will be able to rely on his skills.

The Seal presents a profound opportunity for my students. They're motivated and excited about the prospect of being acknowledged for their achievements and they're very proud of meeting today's English standards while preserving their cultural heritage. And it speaks clearly to those who will be reviewing their transcripts and resumes—it represents a real accomplishment.

You can learn more about the Ohio Seal of Bilingual Literacy on [ODE's website](#).

