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John L. Finan  
*National-Louis University*

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THE ILLINOIS STATE SEAL OF BILITERACY: A POLICY ADVOCACY  
DOCUMENT

John Leo Finan

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of  
Doctor of Education  
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

June, 2014

## NLU Digital Commons Document Origination Statement

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This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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## Abstract

This report advocates for my district's participation in the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy Program, which became law in August 2013. This program places value on developing bilingual or multilingual citizens. Through the demonstration of proficiency in English and one or more foreign languages, students earn the State Seal of Biliteracy, which is recognized on high school diplomas and transcripts. Due to the inherent educational value of language study and the importance of developing cross-cultural 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, this report analyzed the educational, economic, social and political contexts within which the decision to participate in this program was made. Furthermore, attaining these language skills positively affects students' college admissions and future employment opportunities, preparing them for an increasingly global environment.

## Preface

The third year policy advocacy project was a very valuable learning experience as it connected my program evaluation and change leadership studies in years one and two to a policy issue that has become relevant at both the state and national levels. Although the big picture policy view looks at the philosophy behind a State Seal of Biliteracy program, the implications for teaching and learning at the district, building and departmental levels are clear: The support of a State Seal of Biliteracy program makes an affirmative statement about the importance of learning languages other than English, and fosters the development of bilingual and multilingual citizens. Although there is a practical, career-oriented rationale for supporting a State Seal of Biliteracy, the pursuit of bilingual or multilingual abilities is an important component of a well-rounded education that is globally oriented, supportive of multiculturalism and addresses issues of equity for the linguistically diverse population within the United States.

The significant leadership lessons learned include the process of making policy changes and establishing a philosophical position for why such a change is important, as well as the fact that such changes require time. Although my experience as a language teacher has certainly played a role in my advocacy for the State Seal of Biliteracy, I recognize how championing such a policy has implications for educational priorities established at the building or district level. Furthermore, the endorsement of such a policy will require a necessary shift at the classroom level, moving language study toward functional proficiency and performance-based assessment.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
PREFACE.....	ii
SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT .....	1
Introduction to the Policy Issue.....	1
Critical Issues .....	1
SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED.....	7
Educational Analysis.....	7
Economic Analysis.....	10
Social Analysis.....	12
Political Analysis.....	13
Moral and Ethical Analysis.....	16
SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT .....	18
SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT.....	20
SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN.....	24
SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN.....	27
SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT .....	29
References .....	31
Appendix: Illinois Senate Bill 1221.....	38

## **SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT**

### **Introduction to the Policy Issue**

The first two years of my doctoral studies focused on matters related to language teaching and learning. In year one, my program evaluation study focused on oral proficiency in World Languages while in year two, my change leadership plan coincided with the hiring of a new instructional supervisor and provided strategies and action plans for instructional improvement and general department leadership for the future. Through my involvement with national organizations such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) and regional organizations such as the Illinois Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ICTFL), an important policy issue emerged in support of biliteracy and the validation of proficiency in English and at least one foreign language. In Illinois, this policy is connected to Senate Bill 1221, which will provide a mechanism for the State Board of Education and school districts to incentivize and promote the learning of language(s) in addition to English, recognizing the importance of having bilingual or multilingual citizens who have achieved a designated high level of proficiency in English and another language or languages.

### **Critical Issues**

Illinois Senate Bill 1221 became law after being signed by Governor Quinn on August 27, 2013. It became Public Act 98-0560 and the complete text is found in Appendix A. In summary, this addition to the school code promotes and incentivizes the attainment of a professionally acceptable level of proficiency and mastery of English and one or more foreign languages through academic study as well as a proficiency exam.

School districts in the state will participate in the State Seal of Biliteracy Program on a voluntary basis. I advocate for Hillwood High School District to participate, affirming the importance of not just studying a foreign language but becoming proficient. Achieving proficiency is a process that takes time, with language study at the elementary and junior high increasing the likelihood that high school students continuing their studies will become proficient. The goal is to encourage students to further their language studies in college and to implement their bilingual and multilingual abilities in their chosen career path.

A critical issue facing the United States, especially as our nation becomes more ethnically and linguistically diverse, is the importance of having citizens who are biliterate or able to function at an academic/professional level in one or more foreign languages as well as in English (Jackson & Malone, 2009). The United States has recognized this need going back to World War II and since that time has supported initiatives to promote the study of foreign languages and cultures. Unfortunately, our educational system has not produced a large number of students who are proficient in a second language despite many years of study that traditionally had been solely at the high school level.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages presents its Statement of Philosophy as follows:

Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. Children who come to school from non-English backgrounds should also have opportunities to develop further proficiencies in their first language. (ACTFL, 2013a)



“The Five Cs” of the recently revised National Standards for Foreign Language Learning include: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and communities. The ACTFL National Standards describe the communication standard as being at the heart of second language study, whether the communication takes place face-to-face, through writing or across centuries through the reading of literature. “Through the study of other languages, students gain a knowledge and understanding of the cultures that use that language and, in fact, cannot truly master the language until they have also mastered the cultural contexts in which the language occurs” (ACTFL, 2011, p. 2).

A common theme in educational standards, whether they come from discipline specific organizations like ACTFL or broader groups like the state of Illinois or the 21st Century Skills Initiative, is for American students to become more globally aware and to communicate with people and communities from around the globe in their native languages. The United States has traditionally lagged behind in this regard compared to Europe, Latin America and Asia, where learning English is required and formal study begins at an early age when languages are most efficiently acquired and learned. One cannot deny the critical importance of learning a second language for the future of our students and the global society in which they will live. In 2007, the National Research Council published the results of an in-depth, congressionally mandated study and evaluation of the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs in international education and foreign languages. The NRC report concludes with the following recommendation:

The Department of Education needs to develop and implement an integrated strategy for foreign language and international education involving both K-12 and higher education, and ideally additional resources. In carrying out this strategy, the department should work closely with its federal partners, state and local education officials, higher education and national experts; and engage all of its relevant programs, including the Title VI and Fulbright-Hays programs, the

Foreign Language Assistance Program, and other Department programs related to foreign language and international education. Such an integrated strategy is needed to enhance national security, help U.S. businesses compete in an increasingly global economy, and broadly educate and inform the nation's citizens. (as cited in O'Connell, & Norwood, 2007, p.5)

Some of our feeder districts have moved to obligatory study of Spanish or Mandarin Chinese beginning in kindergarten. In other districts in Illinois and across the country, there is growth in the number of dual language schools in which instruction takes place in both English and the designated second language of that particular school. In his article "Dual Language Programs on the Rise" (2011), David McKay Wilson states that in the year 2000, there were about 260 dual language programs operating in the U.S. As of April 2011, there were 2,000 such schools and 300 in the state of New York alone. This approach is aimed at producing students (whose native languages may vary) who are bilingual or multilingual to some degree as they enter high school. This is certainly a step in the right direction for how native English speakers learn a second language in the United States and will allow students to achieve a very advanced level of proficiency as they continue their studies in high school and beyond. At the same time, the status of the non-English language being studied is elevated from 'deficit in need of remediation' to a valuable educational and life asset.

Despite some of these positive trends in advancing the importance of the study of language, much work remains to be done to make achieving language proficiency part of the fabric of our educational system in the United States. According to national surveys conducted under Title VI International Research and Studies grants by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) and ACTFL, there has been little change—or in fact a decrease—in the number of students studying a foreign language when comparing survey

data from 1987, 1997 and 2007. Data from the 2007 survey indicated that the number of American elementary schools offering foreign language courses to their students has unexpectedly dropped by 6% since 1997, with increases in offered courses in Arabic, Chinese, Spanish and Latin, but decreases in offerings of French and German (Wang, Jackson, Mana, Liao, & Evans, 2010).

An ACTFL study in 2000 reported that approximately 33.8% of students in grades 7-12 of American public schools were enrolled in language study; the percentage of only high school students was 43.8%. The CAL study reported that 31% of all elementary schools and 86% of all secondary schools in the U.S. offered at least one foreign language in 1997. In 2006, the figure for elementary schools dropped to 25% (Draper & Hicks, 2002).

The University of Connecticut conducted a four-year study focusing on the articulation of study between secondary school and college which resulted in some interesting findings. 72% of students in the survey who had studied a language in high school declined to enroll in any foreign language in college. Of the 28% who enrolled in a language in the fall term of college, only two-thirds continued with language in the spring (Gosselin, 2004). Having worked in high schools and colleges as a Spanish instructor for more than 17 years, I regularly listened to students speaking of their desire to complete their language requirement. My goal was to inspire or spark their interest in continuing their language studies with the ultimate goal of somehow using the language in their career and in life. I believe the State Seal of Biliteracy will validate the importance of having a bilingual or multilingual citizenry and will encourage intensive and rigorous study of language in order to become proficient or communicatively

competent, allowing students to more fully participate in our increasingly global community within the United States as well as in foreign lands.

## SECTION TWO: ANALYSIS OF NEED

### Educational Analysis

ACTFL and the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) cite empirical research that identifies the academic achievement benefits of developing functional proficiency in another language:

- Language learning correlates with higher academic achievement on standardized test measures.
- Language learning is beneficial to both monolingual English and English language learners in bilingual and two-way immersion programs.
- Language learning is beneficial in the development of students' reading abilities.
- There is evidence that language learners transfer skills from one language to another.
- There is a correlation between second language learning and increased linguistic awareness.
- There is a correlation between language learning and students' ability to hypothesize in science.
- Language learning can benefit all students.
- There is a correlation between young children's second language development and the development of print awareness.
- Heritage learners who use their language skills to interpret and translate for family members experience higher academic performance and greater self-efficacy.

- There is a correlation between language study and higher scores on the SAT and ACT Tests.
- There is a correlation between high school foreign language study and higher academic performance at the college level. (ACTFL, 2013b)

The Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning presents a holistic view of student outcomes and support systems. World languages are among the nine core subjects, and global awareness is one of five interdisciplinary themes. The global awareness theme is defined as:

- Using 21st century skills to understand and address global issues.
- Learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community contexts.
- Understanding other nations and cultures, including the use of non-English languages. (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2013)

The P21 national organization and movement clearly places importance on developing advanced language proficiency along with cross-cultural understanding.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) recently published a position statement regarding languages as a core component of education for all students:

Standards based language learning develops literacy and numeracy, prepares learners in the STEM areas, engages learners through practical applications for special purposes, and strengthens college and career readiness. Finally, language learning is real world education; the knowledge and skills are applied lifelong. (ACTFL, 2013c, para. 5)

Wagner (2008) identifies the seven new survival skills needed to flourish in the global economy and to eliminate the global achievement gap. He describes it as “the gap between what even our *best* suburban, urban and rural public schools are teaching and testing versus what *all* students will need to succeed as learners, workers and citizens in today’s global knowledge economy” (p. 8). Language learning can be connected to most of the seven survival skills, especially critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration across networks and leading by influence, agility and adaptability, and effective oral and written communication.

In a study on the effects of differing degrees of bilingualism on the nonverbal problem-solving abilities of children in third grade, bilingual students demonstrated greater problem solving skills than their monolingual or partially bilingual counterparts (Bialystok & Majumder, 1998). In a meta-analysis of 63 studies involving more than 6,000 subjects on the cognitive effects of bilingualism, the benefits were clear: The results indicated that bilingualism is reliably associated with several cognitive outcomes, including increased attentional control, working memory, metalinguistic awareness, and abstract and symbolic representation skills (Adesope, Lavin, Thompson, & Ungerleider, 2010).

Although language learning has long occupied a status of secondary importance in American public education, its benefits and relevance are distinct for students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although the Common Core Framework is focused on mathematics and language arts, the majority of the components mirror world languages, especially in terms of their intent. In 2012, ACTFL published a document entitled “Alignment of the National Standards for Learning Languages with the Common Core State Standards.”

The National Standards' three modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational) along with the ACTFL Proficiency Guideline levels of novice, intermediate, and advanced, are directly aligned with the English Language Arts

Common Core State Standards:

For example, a key point in the Mathematics Standards is that not only procedural skill but also conceptual understanding is important. The same is true with the study of languages. It is important that language educators move students from simple to complex language usage as they develop the ability to communicate in authentic contexts, just as one would in the culture in which the language is spoken. This progression of language development leads to academic, formal language usage. With regard to the English Language Arts Standards, the goals are virtually identical to those of world languages. (Heining-Boynton & Redmond, 2013, p.52)

The promotion and advancement of the study of languages in addition to English is paramount to the future of our nation and should be woven into the fabric of our American public education system.

### **Economic Analysis**

In a 2006 report from the Committee for Economic Development entitled "Education for Global Leadership: The Importance of International Studies and Foreign Languages for U.S. Economic and National Security," the Committee on Economic Development (CED) stated,

To confront the twenty-first century challenges to our economy and national security, our education system must be strengthened to increase the foreign language skills and cultural awareness of our students. America's continued global leadership will depend on our students' abilities to interact with the world community both inside and outside our borders. . . . For college and career readiness, our students need to be proficient in other languages, regardless of whether they choose to transition directly to the workforce or to post-secondary education. (as cited in Jackson & Malone, 2009)

Zhao (2009) provides us with the perspective of someone who has experienced and witnessed the pitfalls of a high-stakes standardized testing culture in his native China.



He lauds American education for its fostering of creativity and innovation through personalized education, describing a general global competence and the importance of the study of foreign languages to develop a mindset of cross-cultural competency:

“Proficiency in foreign languages is an essential component of cross-cultural competency. Today, many education systems teach foreign languages for economic reasons and thus focus on only communicative competency” (p. 174).

In order to achieve this deeper level of cross-cultural competency, language study must be accompanied by a deep understanding of culture—and as all language teachers know, language and culture are inseparable. The promotion of a bilingual or multilingual citizenry fosters cross-cultural understanding and provides the opportunity for continued economic development across borders but also within the melting pot that is the United States of America.

In *The World is Flat*, Friedman (2005) emphasized that trans-global communication and commerce is not exclusively within the realm of governments or large multinational corporations:

Even at the local level, the clientele of a great number of businesses, shops and small restaurants is typically multilingual. Businesses that are able to interact with customers in their own languages build strong ties to their community as well as loyalty among their customers. To continue to compete successfully in this environment, all Americans should have basic functional knowledge of a foreign language and culture. (p. 477)

As the global economy and the nature of the American economy continue to evolve, knowledge of languages other than English will be of great value, particularly those that are the heritage languages of our citizens and immigrant population. Learning a language can certainly reap economic benefits, but it is not the sole purpose of exposing children to other languages. Through language study, children gain an appreciation for

other cultures that form a part of and contribute to American society. In response to a question about our children being viewed as global competitors, author Diane Ravitch stated in a lecture entitled “The Death and Life of the Great American School System” at Elmhurst College on September 10, 2013, “My grandson is not a global competitor...he is 6 years old.” In other words, not every child has to be prepared for a lifetime of involvement in international commerce. Rather, language study and the promotion of proficiency in multiple languages should be one component of a well-rounded educational experience that we provide for our citizens.

### **Social Analysis**

We live in a massive linguistic melting pot. The mixture of languages and varying cultural backgrounds in the United States can be viewed as both a point of strength and a challenge. We are a nation of immigrants, proud of our origins and often interested in maintaining heritage languages while understanding that the road to prosperity in the United States must include mastery of the English language. Many Native Americans and immigrant groups eventually lost their native languages through assimilation and thus, a part of their being and soul. Although the United States does not technically have an official language, it is understood that English is the language of business, politics, education and government. Immigrants understand the importance of learning English in order to prosper and experience the American Dream.

According to 2011 Census data, the United States has a population of approximately 291,000,000 inhabitants age five and older. Of that population, 60,000,000 people spoke a language other than English at home. Interestingly, nearly 60% of this subgroup described their English skills as “spoke English very well.” Nearly 20% of

those who spoke a language other than English at home spoke English well and approximately 22% spoke English “not well” or “not at all” (Ryan, 2013). In summary, the subgroup that does not speak English very well or not at all makes up less than 5% of the population in the study. The idea that English as the primary language of the nation is being eclipsed by other languages and that the United States is spiraling into an uncontrollable tower of Babel is a myth. The ethnic, racial and linguistic diversity of the United States is our strength and an integral part of the social fabric of our nation.

### **Political Analysis**

Nieto (2010) reflects on the politics of language diversity by looking at U.S history and two conflicting ideas. One is the view that “Some believe that people of all backgrounds should become a melting pot and that ‘E pluribus unum’ (‘out of many, one’), the bedrock of U.S. society, is based on the belief that our nation should be simultaneously supportive of pluralism and dedicated to unity” (p. 1). On the other hand, many believe that English should be the official language of the U.S. and that the promotion of other languages will have a long-term negative impact on our nation and our ability to unify in such a rich and varied linguistic environment. In fact, the U.S census reports that 381 languages other than English are spoken in the homes of U.S residents (Ryan, 2013).

The political landscape of language policy in the United States is intimately connected to our history as a nation of immigrants, both legal and illegal. Some seem to forget that English is not a Native American language, but rather one that is clearly connected to our historical ties with and eventual independence from England. Furthermore, a misunderstanding of U.S. history in terms of languages such as French

and Spanish and their multiple centuries of presence within our current borders is commonplace. The two competing ideologies that want to frame language policy are exclusion and dominance versus inclusion and equality. The former sees diversity negatively and evaluates different groups by assigning differential power to them, while the latter views diversity in a positive light. This positive view of linguistic diversity has led to advances for bilingual and multicultural education, foreign language in the elementary schools, heritage language courses, and other progressive language policies (Nieto, 2010).

U.S. English is an organization that aims to establish English as the official language of the United States of America:

Declaring English the official language means that official government business at all levels must be conducted solely in English. This includes all public documents, records, legislation and regulations, as well as hearings, official ceremonies and public meetings. Official English legislation contains common-sense exceptions permitting the use of languages other than English for such things as public health and safety services, judicial proceedings, foreign language instruction and the promotion of tourism. (U.S. English, 2013a, paras. 1 & 2)

U.S. English makes it clear that they are not an English-only movement and that their objective focuses on establishing one common language to conduct the affairs of the nation:

As evidenced in our legislation, official English would not affect the diversity of languages spoken in the home, foreign languages learned in classrooms, mottoes, Native American languages and the like. Making English the official language of the United States refers solely to the language of the government, not of the people, private business, classrooms, etc. Passage of official English legislation would not make the United States “English-Only [*sic*],” just as Nigeria is not “English-Only [*sic*]” and Mexico is not “Spanish-Only [*sic*].” (U.S. English, 2013b)

Despite the tone and message of welcoming linguistic diversity, U.S. English is often viewed as anti-immigrant and discriminatory. U.S. English has criticized recent

pieces of legislation due to their lack of an English language component, as viewed in this press release:

**Washington, DC**—U.S. English Chairman Mauro E. Mujica today released the following statement in response to the Senate’s passage of a comprehensive immigration reform bill.S. 744, the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act, will permit current illegal immigrants to stay in the United States upon meeting certain criteria, including paying back taxes and undergoing background checks. The bill also includes increased border security provisions, which should be enforced prior to granting amnesty to illegal immigrants.

“It is extremely disappointing that the Senate’s immigration reform bill of more than 1,200 pages does not include any of the English language amendments that were proposed,” Chairman Mujica said. “English proficiency is the one tool that immigrants to the United States need to succeed here. Rather than making it easier for immigrants to come to this country and maintain their native language, the government should be encouraging them to assimilate and learn our common language. English proficiency is already required for naturalization, and should likewise be required prior to granting residency to illegal immigrants.”

The legislation passed the Senate on Thursday by a vote of 68 – 32 and now awaits consideration in the U.S. House of Representatives. Senator Marco Rubio, Senator Jim Inhofe and Senator Deb Fischer all introduced amendments that would have strengthened English language requirements and processes. One would have declared English the official language of the United States government, one would have required immigrants to demonstrate English proficiency prior to gaining residency, and one would have accounted for the cost of multilingualism in the federal government. None of these amendments were included in the legislation passed by the Senate.

“As the House of Representatives prepares to take up immigration reform legislation, I strongly urge them to include crucial provisions highlighting the importance of English proficiency among immigrants to the United States,” Mujica added. “Immigrants who learn English prior to becoming residents of the United States will find that doors of opportunity open to them and they will be able to contribute to society on a level playing field with native citizens. The English language is the one thread that unites American citizens in our diversity, and immigration reform that does not require English proficiency is not serving its purpose. (U.S. English, 2013c)

As language policy issues are so intimately connected to the long-standing and ongoing immigration debate in the United States, such issues will continue to be politically charged and controversial.

### **Moral and Ethical Analysis**

The ACTFL has published a position statement on diversity and inclusion in language programs:

ACTFL and its members are committed to developing and maintaining a teaching and learning environment that reflects the broad diversity of American society. We welcome teachers and students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds to language programs. We believe that all children should have the opportunity to learn other languages and support full access for all students to language programs. (ACTFL, 2013d)

Promoting the learning of a second language among native English speakers, heritage instruction for learners whose family language is a foreign tongue, and strengthening the English language skills of both native speakers and English language learners provides educational equity for a diverse group of learners. The ability to speak a foreign language as well as one's native tongue in the United States is often viewed as a deficiency in need of correction as opposed to the advantage or asset that it truly is.

No Child Left Behind had as one of its noble goals the elimination of the achievement gap between the dominant group in our society and subgroups such as Hispanic and African American students, students who are at a disadvantage socioeconomically, and students with disabilities. Members of a very large subgroup of 60 million people, which in itself is tremendously diverse, are those who speak a language other than English in the home. Bilingualism or multilingualism needs to be viewed as a resource and not as a deficit in need of correction or remediation. If our goal is to promote educational equity, leaders must recognize the strengths that speakers of

other languages possess and that maintenance of a heritage language and fostering a welcoming environment for linguistic diversity is as important as learning English.

### **SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT**

My purpose is to advocate for the following: Hillwood High School District should voluntarily participate in the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy Program beginning in the 2014-15 school year. By participating in this program, Hillwood District is affirming its support for developing bilingual or multilingual students who are proficient in English and one or more languages. As stated in the language on the newly adopted law, the purposes of the State Seal of Biliteracy are as follows:

- To encourage pupils to study languages.
- To certify attainment of biliteracy.
- To provide employers with a method of identifying people with language and biliteracy skills.
- To provide universities with an additional method to recognize applicants seeking admission.
- To prepare pupils with 21st century skills.
- To recognize the value of foreign language and native language instruction in public schools.
- To strengthen intergroup relationships, affirm the value of diversity, and honor the multiple cultures and languages of a community.

By participating in this program, Hillwood District is affirming the strengths of the bilingual or multilingual constituents of our community, whether they be native speakers or heritage learners of Hebrew, Korean, Russian, or Spanish, to name a few of the common languages spoken in the homes of many of our students. Equally important is the development of the English language skills of students who are members of these



or other linguistic minority groups. As many of these students have attended schools in the United States since preschool, they have already achieved a native level fluency in English, and their bilingual or multilingual abilities are an asset. At the same time, District 225's participation in this program affirms the importance of the native English-speaking population becoming proficient in a foreign language while continuing to advance their abilities in their native tongue.

## SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

Section Three provided a context within which the State Seal of Biliteracy will operate. It also provided a general philosophy as to what a Seal of Biliteracy aims to accomplish and a broad overview of the educational, economic, social, political and moral contexts and implications of such a policy.

This section operates on a more local and practical level, reviewing the pros and cons of implementing a Seal of Biliteracy Program at the both district and secondary school level.

The primary reason for championing a Seal of Biliteracy Program is for its overall educational value and how such a program will open doors and create opportunity for all students. Diane Ravitch (2013) articulates the essentials of a good education in her book *Reign of Error*:

Every school should have a full, balanced, and rich curriculum, including the arts, science, history, literature, civics, geography, foreign language, mathematics, and physical education. . . . to function effectively in the world of the twenty-first century, students should learn a foreign language. They should use their language skills to learn about the culture, literature, history, and arts of other societies. They should broaden their knowledge of the world so that they recognize that other people think differently; by doing so, they may abandon narrow provincialism and get a clearer understanding of other cultures. (p. 239)

Ravitch emphasizes the importance of offering learning opportunities in the fine arts, physical education and the study of foreign languages to name a few, although current reform movements urge us to eliminate such fringe discipline areas for the sake of demonstrating “achievement” through growth in standardized test measures. In her book *The Death and Life of the Great American School System* (2010), Ravitch eloquently summarizes, “Our schools will not improve if we value only what tests measure. The tests we have now provide useful information about students' progress in reading and

mathematics, but they cannot measure what matters most in education...What is tested may ultimately be less important than what is untested” (p. 225).

The study of language is of great educational value whether native English speakers learn a foreign tongue, heritage learners refine their ancestral language abilities while building upon their English language skills, or educated native speakers of foreign languages learn English as a second language. This accumulation of linguistic knowledge and skill benefits learners as well as the larger society to which they belong. There is great richness in diversity.

The philosophical arguments against a State Seal of Biliteracy center around whether bilingual or multilingual abilities are viewed as a priority in the United States. These arguments are often politically connected to the English-only movement, which views the influx of other languages as a threat to the status of English as the primary language of commerce, government and society in general. Such arguments are supported by a strong anti-immigrant stance that sees jobs going to illegal immigrants as opposed U.S citizens. My purpose in this section is to move beyond the philosophical discussion to one of implementation and the subsequent potential pitfalls for a school district in Illinois that is contemplating a State Seal of Biliteracy Program.

One con argument is that the State Seal of Biliteracy will not increase the number of students choosing to study a foreign language as intended. This argument is connected to the idea that our lack of emphasis on the study of foreign languages in the United States is a systemic weakness. Language instruction does not begin at an early enough age to be effective, and the majority of our citizens do not view learning a second language as something of personal value. Unlike Europe, our educational system has not

placed a priority on being multilingual until more recently with the creation of the dual language school model.

Another argument against the implementation of a State Seal of Biliteracy is that the procedures for earning the seal are complicated and unfair. Native speakers of English will have one set of criteria involving grades in English and one of several different options for a proficiency exam in the second language. If the second language is one that is taught in the district, the student may be able to demonstrate their proficiency through an Advanced Placement exam. Some languages, such as Hebrew or Mandarin, do not currently offer an A.P. exam and therefore, an externally administered exam is taken at the expense of the student and his or her family. Students who are heritage speakers of a language such as Spanish or Russian may understand and speak the language to a certain degree, but may not write well and thus would not be considered proficient. This group of students would need to earn the seal through performance in English classes as well as continued training in the heritage language. Hillwood South offers a heritage Spanish track and Hillwood Central does not, given their varying demographics. Without a heritage learner track of courses, the student in question must seek other ways in which to enhance and improve their language abilities. Ultimately, the same type of proficiency exam, whether A.P. or externally administered, would be the measure for demonstrating proficiency in one's heritage language. For the demonstration of English language skills, will grades in all tracks of courses be acceptable measures for certifying proficiency? The implementation of a State Seal of Biliteracy Program is complex and will require a thorough exploration of these and other issues.

The pros for a school district that participates in the program are numerous. As a cornerstone of the philosophy of a Seal of Biliteracy Program, enrollments in language study will grow as the study of language, along with the goal of becoming proficient (as opposed to simply completing a requirement), will be incentivized. Students' academic records will be enhanced as they pursue higher education and/or employment opportunities. A long-term positive effect of a State Seal of Biliteracy Program is the curricular and instructional shift that will necessarily take place. World language programs will need to shift from a focus that has often been on learning about the language to an approach that focuses on what can be done with the language, as evidenced by performance-based assessment connected to one of the three communication modes. This shift does not mean that language study needs to move away from the study of culture or great works of literature but rather, how can we immerse students in meaningful communication tasks that emerge out of the study of cultural themes? Depending on the nature of the themes to be studied, relevant vocabulary, grammatical structures and cultural norms and practices are incorporated, given the inseparable nature of language and culture. Unfortunately, the focus of language study has often been organized around grammar points and bodies of vocabulary with culture as a sidebar topic, packaged in an unauthentic text program.

With an ultimate goal of producing bilingual or multilingual citizens, alternate models of language teaching and learning will continue to expand. The dual language school model has experienced tremendous growth and is, in my opinion, one of the most important components of achieving this goal.

## **SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

This section will briefly outline the plan and time frame for the implementation of the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy in Hillwood High School District.

1. I scheduled a formal meeting with the Hillwood District Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services to introduce the concept of the State Seal of Biliteracy. This occurred in the Winter of 2014.
2. Beginning in Fall 2013, I will monitor the progress of Lincoln-Way Community High School District 210, as their district is piloting the implementation of the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy. I communicated with the President of the Illinois Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language, who is also a teacher in District 210. This occurred in the Winter of 2014.
3. I will meet with the Hillwood District Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services in order to schedule a discussion with the Board of Education Policy Committee. This will occur in Spring or Summer 2014.
4. Depending on the outcome of the discussions from #3 above, a tentative date will be established for placing the State Seal of Biliteracy topic as an agenda item for a Board of Education meeting. This will occur in Summer or Fall 2014.
5. Plan for the logistics of implementation:
  - a. Identify the targeted language proficiency goal in collaboration with the instructional supervisors of World Languages and guided by ACTFL recommendations, as well as identify a minimal level of

proficiency by skill that needs to be achieved in order to qualify for the State Seal.

- b. Establish testing and measurement procedures for native English speakers studying a foreign language in school, native of speakers of a non-English language who are studying their heritage language and are proficient in English, bilingual students who speak a language not taught in the district, and recently arrived ELL students who were educated in their native language and whose focus is now on becoming proficient in English.
  - c. The law states that the State Seal of Biliteracy will have minimal cost to both school districts and students working toward earning the State Seal. The cost of taking an externally administered proficiency exam will be the responsibility of the student. However, policy will need to be developed in order to address the cost of assessments that a school may use to serve as the measurement of language proficiency for awarding the State Seal. If a school does not currently use such an assessment, there will be an additional cost for World Language departments to incorporate these assessments into their curriculum.
  - d. Develop policy recommendations for free and reduced students and their potential costs incurred in working toward the State Seal of Biliteracy.
6. Coordinate logistics of placing the State Seal on transcripts and diplomas with the State of Illinois and district registrars.

7. Develop a communications plan with Hillwood District Public Relations personnel in order to communicate district participation in the State Seal of Biliteracy Program with students and families.



## **SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN**

At the time of the writing of this study, it is not known whether Hillwood District will choose to participate in the State Seal of Biliteracy Program. In the event that the district does participate, the assessment of such a program necessitates a longitudinal study. The components of the study should include the following;

1. Track the number of students studying a World Language each year.
2. For each graduating class of seniors, track the number of students and percentage of the overall class that studied a World Language for four years.
3. Track the number of students and percentage of the overall class entering high school that are placed in advanced level World Language classes 263/273 or above.
4. Track the number of students who complete the requirements for earning the State Seal of Biliteracy and separate them into two groups: native speakers of English and 'others'. Native speakers of English will be defined as students whose primary language in the home is English and/or whose language of instruction in their academic preparation from kindergarten through high school has been English. 'Others' include students whose home language is a non-English language and whose language of instruction in their academic preparation in any grade since kindergarten has been a non-English language.
5. Track the number students earning the State Seal of Biliteracy in the language other than English by either of the following means: completion of World Languages courses and performance on proficiency measure that is part of the

course curriculum and requirements, or completion of an externally administered proficiency exam paid for by the student (OPI, etc.).

6. Track the number of State Seals awarded on an annual basis and categorize by the language or languages in addition to English (i.e. English and Spanish; English and Mandarin; Spanish and Korean; English, Russian and Spanish; etc.)

## **SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy will have a tremendously positive impact on Illinois students and schools in the future. The primary impact of the State Seal is that language learning and the value of bilingual or multilingual abilities become a recognized component of a well-rounded, multicultural, 21<sup>st</sup> century educational experience. In addition to the scientifically-proven cognitive benefits of language study, the adoption of a State Seal can assist students as they seek college admissions and future employment opportunities.

Hillwood District already offers a diverse set of language study options including less commonly studied languages such as German, Hebrew, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, and Russian. Students are afforded the opportunity to study Classical Latin as well as the commonly studied modern Romance languages of French and Spanish. At Hillwood South, native Spanish-speaking students can continue their studies through a heritage track of Spanish courses and can study American Sign Language. Hillwood District provides tremendous opportunities in comparison to many high school districts. The Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy places an emphasis on language proficiency and elevates the status of language study by certifying functional language proficiency as opposed to recognition of a sequence of courses. My goal is increased enrollment in language programs as students begin to see the practical application of language skills in career pathways and general life endeavors. I believe a renewed emphasis on the study of languages and the pursuit of bilingual or multilingual abilities will have a positive impact on the lives of students, opening up windows of opportunity and strengthening their overall educational experience.

One of the sponsoring Illinois Senators, Iris Martinez, summarizes the impact of the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy as such:

The ability to communicate in more than one language opens up a wide variety of employment, academic, social and cultural opportunities right here in Illinois... Making the Seal of Biliteracy available to students will encourage language learning and help our graduates compete in the global marketplace. (Illinois Senate Democrats, 2013, para. 4)

Measuring the impact of the Illinois State Seal of Biliteracy will require a significant amount of time. The ability of high school students to achieve a functional level of proficiency in a language other than English is tied to many factors. These factors include the language(s) spoken in the home, the number of years of formal study and a critical point, the age at which formal studies or exposure to a language began. As our educational system moves closer to a model in which all students study English and another language beginning in pre-school or kindergarten, we are more likely to be able to produce bilingual or multilingual citizens. The study of foreign languages and cultures is valuable in and of itself but its prominence as a central component of our educational system must be elevated in order to produce students that are proficient as they exit our educational system and are ready to apply their acquired language abilities in their career and life. I am optimistic that the United States will embrace the aims of the State Seal of Biliteracy programs such as those in California, New York and now Illinois enriching our already diverse linguistic landscape and placing educational, personal and practical value on possessing bilingual or multilingual abilities.

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Appendix

Illinois Senate Bill 1221: State Seal of Bilingual Literacy

Public Act 098-0560

SB1221 Enrolled LRB098 07343 NHT 37406 b

AN ACT concerning education.

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois, represented in the General Assembly:

Section 1. Legislative intent.

(a) It is the intent of the legislature to encourage excellence for all pupils, and the legislature wishes to publicly recognize pupils for exemplary achievements in academic studies.

(b) The study of languages other than English in elementary and secondary schools should be encouraged because it contributes to a pupil's cognitive development and to our national economy and security.

(c) Proficiency in multiple languages is critical in enabling this State to participate effectively in a global political, social, and economic context and in expanding trade with other countries.

(d) The demand for employees to be fluent in more than one language is increasing both in this State and throughout the world.

(e) The benefits to employers in having staff fluent in more than one language are clear: access to an expanded market, allowing business owners to better serve their customers' needs, and the sparking of new marketing ideas that better target a particular audience and open a channel of communication with customers and businesses in other countries.

(f) It is the intent of the legislature to promote linguistic proficiency and cultural literacy in one or more languages in addition to English and to provide recognition of the attainment of those needed and important skills through the establishment of the State Seal of Biliteracy. A State Seal of Biliteracy would be designated on the high school diplomas and transcripts of graduating public school pupils attaining proficiency in one or more languages in addition to English.

Section 5. The School Code is amended by adding Section 2-3.157 as follows:

(105 ILCS 5/2-3.157 new)

Sec. 2-3.157. State Seal of Biliteracy.

(a) In this Section, "foreign language" means any language other than English, including all modern languages, Latin, American Sign Language, Native American languages, and native languages.

(b) The State Seal of Biliteracy Program is established to recognize public high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in one or more languages in addition to English. The State Seal of Biliteracy shall be awarded beginning with the 2014-2015 school year. School district participation in this program is voluntary.

(c) The purposes of the State Seal of Biliteracy are as follows:

- (1) To encourage pupils to study languages.
  - (2) To certify attainment of biliteracy.
  - (3) To provide employers with a method of identifying people with language and biliteracy skills.
  - (4) To provide universities with an additional method to recognize applicants seeking admission.
  - (5) To prepare pupils with 21st century skills.
  - (6) To recognize the value of foreign language and native language instruction in public schools.
  - (7) To strengthen intergroup relationships, affirm the value of diversity, and honor the multiple cultures and languages of a community.
- (d) The State Seal of Biliteracy certifies attainment of a high level of proficiency, sufficient for meaningful use in college and a career, by a graduating public high school pupil in one or more languages in addition to English.
- (e) The State Board of Education shall adopt such rules as may be necessary to establish the criteria that pupils must achieve to earn a State Seal of Biliteracy, which may include without limitation attainment of units of credit in English language arts and languages other than English and passage of such assessments of foreign language proficiency as may be approved by the State Board of Education for this purpose.
- (f) The State Board of Education shall do both of the following:

(1) Prepare and deliver to participating school districts an appropriate mechanism for designating the State Seal of Biliteracy on the diploma and transcript of the pupil indicating that the pupil has been awarded a State Seal of Biliteracy by the State Board of Education.

(2) Provide other information the State Board of Education deems necessary for school districts to successfully participate in the program

(g) A school district that participates in the program under this Section shall do both of the following:

(1) Maintain appropriate records in order to identify pupils who have earned a State Seal of Biliteracy.

(2) Make the appropriate designation on the diploma and transcript of each pupil who earns a State Seal of Biliteracy.

(h) No fee shall be charged to a pupil to receive the designation pursuant to this Section. Notwithstanding this prohibition, costs may be incurred by the pupil in demonstrating proficiency, including without limitation any assessments required under subsection (e) of this Section.

Section 99. Effective date. This Act takes effect July 1, 2013.