

Review of World Language Competencies and Determination of Credit Equivalencies

Report to the Legislature

by the

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and

Minnesota Department of Education

February 15, 2015



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Minnesota Department of
Education

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Competencies and
Determination of Credit
Equivalencies**

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Report to the Legislature

As required by

Minnesota Statutes

Chapter 272, Article 1, Section 42

120B.022

Cost of Report Preparation

The total cost for the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to prepare this report was approximately \$ 3,572.34. Most of these costs involved staff time in analyzing data from surveys and preparing the written report. Incidental costs include paper, copying, and other office supplies.

The total cost for the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU) to prepare this report was approximately \$ 8,068.40. Most of these costs involved faculty and staff time in analyzing current practices, obtaining faculty and staff input, and preparing the written report. Incidental costs include paper, copying, and other office supplies. The legislative expectation to consult broadly in the development of the report resulted in other substantial costs that are not as easily determined. Foremost among these, is the uncalculated overhead of eight hours of work and travel time for 80 professionals from around the state, plus uncalculated mileage.

Estimated costs are provided in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 2011, section 3.197, which requires that at the beginning of a report to the Legislature, the cost of preparing the report must be provided.

Total costs for both institutions are approximately \$11,640.74.

Executive Summary

Minnesota 2014 Session Laws, Chapter 272, Article 1, Section 42 required the commissioner of Education and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MNSCU) chancellor to report by February 15, 2015, on determination of credit and course equivalencies for state world language certificates and seals awarded to K-12 students under Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.22, subdivisions 1a and 1b. The scope of this report is the granting of foreign language college credit for the bilingual and multilingual seals and world language proficiency certificates. Consultation with the world language faculty at MnSCU, the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) identified several issues regarding implementation of the legislation. They are included in the findings, determinations, and recommendation of the report.

Findings

The review revealed that the number of world language certificates awarded has, until recently, been limited. In 2013-2014, 749 certificates were earned by K-12 students. Three Chinese immersion programs awarded 539, or about 70 percent, of the certificates—to students in grades four and five, while 220 certificates, or 29 percent, were awarded to high-school students at two schools. Faculty who reviewed this data expressed concerns about students' language retention upon college entrance, particularly for those who earned certificates in elementary school.

A significant part of the review conducted by MnSCU faculty and administrators, in consultation with University of Minnesota faculty, focused on the kinds and significance of assessment related to the world language certificates and seals. Concern was expressed about the assessment of less commonly taught languages and of languages without writing systems, for example. The standards of proficiency required by the current legislation were found to be high, and possibly too high to present students with feasible options.

All involved expressed a hope that the award of college credit for the certificates and seals would raise teacher and student awareness of, and encourage greater participation in, the certificates and seals programs and in ongoing world language study through K-16 education as well as recognize the native languages students already possess.

Determinations

While the assessment of proficiency level is conducted at the K-12 level and is the responsibility of the high schools, the MnSCU and University of Minnesota systems also have policies and processes in place for assessing proficiency of students and, in some cases, for granting Credit for Prior Learning. The legislation provided an opportunity to align the demonstrated proficiencies with the awarding of semester credits. The following table summarizes the determinations of this report. The minimum levels of credit to be awarded are listed in terms of semesters of credit, permitting each language department and each college or university to award credits per course as appropriate.

Faculty determined that these levels should be awarded as minimums, and that students should have the opportunity to receive additional credit through optional additional assessment. They also decided that the demonstration of language proficiency should have occurred no more than 36 months prior to enrolling in a college or university. Students awarded certificates or seals earlier than 36 months prior will be asked to take a current proficiency assessment before credit is awarded.

Seal or Certificate	Proficiency level	Awarded credits
World Language Proficiency Certificate	ACTFL Intermediate-Low	2 semesters
World Language High Proficiency Certificate	ACTFL Intermediate-High	3 semesters
Bilingual or Multilingual Seal	Foreign Service Institute 3	4 semesters per language

Recommendations

The world language educators who reviewed the legislation and prepared this report join with the Legislature in enthusiasm for recognizing students' language skills and for encouraging further language study. Toward that end, they made several recommendations for modification in the language of the statute. Those include:

- specifying assessment options to ensure consistency and equity for less commonly taught languages;
- modifying the proficiency level to better reflect college courses using the ACTFL proficiency standards since the Foreign Services Institute examination is not available to the public and ACTFL standards are used nationwide in K-16;
- amending the legislative requirement so that the assessment by the community experts includes support from an ACTFL trained professional;

- removing language that references licensed immersion teachers since the state does not have an immersion license.

Introduction

Minnesota 2014 Session Laws, Chapter 272, Article 1, Section 42 (see Appendix A) required the commissioner of education and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities chancellor to report by February 15, 2015, on the determination of credit and course equivalencies for state world language certificates and seals awarded to K-12 students under Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.22, subdivisions 1a and 1b. After consultation with the world language faculty at MnSCU and the University of Minnesota, this report provides findings, determinations, and recommendations.

MDE, MnSCU, and the University of Minnesota conducted a review to address the statutory requirement and to inform MnSCU faculty's decisions about the award of credit for the bilingual and multilingual seals, and potentially, for the certificates that demonstrate competencies attained by K-12 students or that K-12 students have as a home language. The statute puts Minnesota at the forefront of a national discussion on recognition of students' world language skills and on state bilingual seals and certificates. It also elevates the importance of student preparation for living and working in a global society that benefits from the language expertise of K-12 and college graduates.

The development of this report involved consultation over the following timeline.

- August 11, 2014 – Teleconference for MnSCU faculty and administration, along with University of Minnesota and MDE staff, outlined the terms of the legislation
- October 3 – Convening of MnSCU world languages faculty and administration, MDE staff, and University of Minnesota faculty and administration to discuss legislation, determine equivalencies, and identify report elements
- October 13 – November 18 – Development of draft report by team of MnSCU faculty and deans, as well as MnSCU and MDE staff
- November 20 – Distribution of draft report for review and comment to MnSCU chief academic officers, deans, and October 3 meeting attendees
- November 24 – Teleconference for writing team to walk through report with all interested faculty and administration
- November 25 – Sharing of draft report with University of Minnesota Language Center staff and faculty serving on the Committee on Second Language Education
- December 5 – End of review and comment period for draft report

- December 15 – Provision of draft report to Chancellor Steven Rosenstone and Commissioner Brenda Cassellius

Findings

K-12 Education - Level of Activity

The World Language Proficiency Certificate, in Minnesota statute since 2009, targets the levels that students in traditional language programs are able to attain in four, and often three, years of high school language study. However, award of the world language certificates has, until recently, been extremely limited. Teachers have cited several reasons for the lack of use of the certificates:

1. Some schools are not aware of the certificates.
2. Assessing students in reading, writing, listening and speaking on a validated language proficiency test requires schools to incur costs in time and dollars.
3. Because world language study is an elective subject area, the required resources for teaching and assessment are not always available.
4. Perhaps most importantly, the certificates carry few benefits beyond a notation on students' transcripts for applications for postsecondary education or employment. Students do not always perceive immediate benefits to developing high proficiency in language since the benefits are not as highly publicized as Advanced Placement (AP) English or History.

Certificates are issued to the school by MDE upon receipt of a request providing the names and scores of students earning a certificate.

The following table provides the level of recent activity for the certificate award. Students who earned the certificate were from three Chinese immersion programs which were assessed as elementary students, and two high schools in one district (Spanish and French Languages).

Recent Certificates Issued by the Department of Education

Certificates Spring 2013 – Fall 2014	Total	High School Students	Immersion Students (Grades 4-5)
Intermediate-Low	679	184	495

Certificates Spring 2013 – Fall 2014	Total	High School Students	Immersion Students (Grades 4-5)
High achievement	70	36	44

Source: Minnesota Department of Education

Students in immersion schools are able to earn world language proficiency and high-achievement certificates as early as fourth and fifth grade, while students who begin language in middle or high school generally receive certificates during or at the end of high school.

K-12 Assessment for World Language Certificates and Seals

Assessment is multi-dimensional and there are many different approaches. MDE staff provided the following overview for MnSCU and University of Minnesota faculty as they considered the proficiency and skill levels of students earning certificates and degrees at the K-12 level. Additional detail is provided in the appendices.

Nationwide, K-16 language classes use the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Scale to measure student proficiency levels and growth. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) scale and assessments required by the Minnesota legislation are used by the U.S. government to measure and assess the proficiency levels of those who wish to work in governmental agencies requiring language skills and are not available to the public. For other contexts—e.g., postsecondary English courses for speakers of a language other than English, or for placement—some programs use the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale. The ILR scale uses the same terms and criteria as the FSI. Appendix B comparing the ILR (same criteria as FSI) scale, the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and other scales shows the ACTFL level of Superior as equivalent to FSI 3, the level required by the legislation. However, use of the ILR in postsecondary ESL programs is rare. The University of Minnesota, like most U.S. research universities, requires a minimum TOEFL iBT (Test of English as a Foreign Language internet-based test) score of 79 (or other test score equivalent to ACTFL Advanced Low) for admission to full-time coursework.

To provide further reference points of proficiency levels to learners and instructors, ACTFL and the College Board have compared expectations for scores on the AP (Advanced Placement) language tests, ACTFL proficiency levels and the recommended number of credits for each score. The following is based on a personal communication in 2014 from Paul Sandrock, the ACTFL director of Education.

“The best we can provide would be a ‘ball park’ idea of how ACTFL proficiency levels seem to parallel the expectations for different passing scores on the AP exam. Anecdotal evidence and examination of the scoring rubric indicate that students who are showing evidence of Intermediate Mid proficiency are likely to score a 3 (passing score); students showing evidence of Intermediate High proficiency are likely to score a 4 or 5; students showing evidence of Advanced level proficiency are the most likely to score a 5 on the AP exam. As we said, this is only based on an examination of the scoring rubric and anecdotal evidence. It is not based on a research study administering both assessments and making the comparison.”

AP Exam Score	Amount of Credit Granted (in credit hours)	Placement into Which Semester?
3	6 to 8	3 rd Semester
4	9 to 12	4 th Semester
5	12 to 16	5 th Semester

With regard to ASL (American Sign Language) and languages whose nature does not include reading, writing, listening and speaking but rather the ability to be receptive and expressive in that language, appropriate assessments at an equivalent level will need to guide proficiency assessment.

ASL standards include some recognized assessment tools. The Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) Rating Scale is a standard scale for rating sign language communication skills that compares performances to the standard scale and is criterion referenced. An emerging alternative is the American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASLPI) which is recognized for efforts to assess evaluators in order to improve the reliability and consistency of proficiency assessments.

Sign language proficiency assessment interviews document the level of proficiency or how well the individual can function using ASL/sign language to communicate his/her thoughts, ideas, and opinions in a face-to-face conversation with a superior level sign communicator. SLPI proficiency levels range from no functional skills to superior plus. The SLPI level descriptions are adapted for sign language but are consistent with ACTFL descriptors. [Read the ACTFL proficiency Descriptors.](#)

ASLPI proficiency levels are determined based on a scale of 0 – 5 that follows the FSI ratings.

Sources:

[Read a description of the Sign Language Proficiency Rating Scale](#)
[SLPI assesses and information about other sign language assessment tools](#)
[Read the Standards for Learning American Sign Language](#)
[Read information about the American Sign Language Proficiency Interview](#)

Assessment Availability for Seals

The ACTFL OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview), the ACTFL LTP (Listening Test for Professionals) for listening, the RPT (Reading Test for Professionals) for reading and WPT (Writing Proficiency Test) for writing proficiency are the only validated assessments available at the level equivalent to FSI 3. ACTFL offers oral proficiency testing in more than 100 languages and writing proficiency testing in 18 languages.

The OPIc (Oral Proficiency Interview – Computer (OPIc) is available as a computer mediated assessment for speaking only for Arabic, Bengali, English, French, German, Indonesian, Korean, Mandarin, Pashto, Persian Farsi, Russian, Spanish and Tagalog.

Although ACTFL is able to assess many languages to the superior level, Minnesota students represent more than 240 home languages according to home language questionnaires. All of Minnesota’s home languages cannot be readily assessed with an ACTFL assessment. [Read about the languages and levels of the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Assessments.](#)

Assessment Availability for World Language Proficiency Certificates

Companies that develop assessments for language learning and teaching focus on Intermediate-High and below although some have developed and validated proficiency assessments at Advanced-Low. Teachers in K-12 currently base their performance assessments on ACTFL assessment models.

Assessments at Intermediate-Low, Mid and Advanced-Low are commercially available for commonly taught and spoken languages and for some less commonly taught languages. Assessment of less commonly taught languages and languages spoken by a small number of people, including some indigenous languages, will require local development using criteria required to meet the targeted proficiency level based on ACTFL proficiency guidelines.

Assessment by Community Experts

The legislation currently allows for non-licensed community experts and immersion teachers to assess student proficiency levels when valid instruments are unavailable. This allowance does not provide the kind of validity required for

awarding of credit at the college and university level. We understand a valid assessment as one that has undergone psychometric analysis, field testing and revision. In an effort to respect the intent of the legislation and ensure consistency and equity in awarding seals, when valid and reliable instruments are not available for a language, immersion teachers and non-licensed community experts need to work collaboratively with an expert who has been trained in ACTFL proficiency assessment to produce a reliable instrument for languages where a validated assessments is unavailable.

The language proficiency level of the community expert is important as fluency does not equal high levels of proficiency in a language and one is generally not able to test at a level above one's own language. Teachers and community experts require training, such as ACTFL proficiency training, and professional development to develop and use consistent criteria in developing assessments and applying a rubric that defines the Superior level (FSI 3) or any other proficiency level.

MnSCU faculty and staff also discussed with MDE staff the challenges to schools in identifying community experts, their training, the time required for developing a reliable assessment and the administration of the assessment. Since the intent of this report is to address the granting of college credit for students that have earned SEALS or certificates these challenges were not addressed. However, all agree that further discussion regarding these challenges is necessary.

Higher Education

Across the MnSCU system there exists a variety of methods by which students are able to earn college credits for language(s) learned outside of the system. There are standardized assessments available at most campuses for students to demonstrate proficiency in the different modalities of a language: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Those proficiency assessments range from computer-based to personal interactions with instructors and professors, depending on the campus, and as the assessment warrants (speaking, for example).

The October 3, 2014 convening of faculty and administration indicated a clear desire for appropriate placement for language proficiency and awarding of credit for previous language learning and demonstrated proficiency. It is critical that incoming students are placed in language courses by their assessment scores, in order to assure an effective learning environment. Among the pathways to credit attainment and/or placement are the following offered by the MnSCU and University of Minnesota systems:

- Postsecondary Enrollment Options: High school students may earn both secondary and postsecondary credit for college or university courses completed on a college or university campus, at a high school, or at another location.

- College in the Schools: High school juniors and seniors take free college-level courses at their high school through partnerships between high schools and local colleges and universities.
- College Level Examination Program: Students of any age take exams on a variety of college level topics to demonstrate proficiency for credit.
- Advanced Placement: Through a program of The College Board, secondary students complete college level courses that are designated as AP in high schools. A student may earn college credits by demonstrating a specified level of performance on AP examinations.
- Placement Exams: Each of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities offers various placement exams for students who wish to study world languages. It is important to distinguish between placement assessment and proficiency assessment that is associated with awarding of credit for prior learning. Placement is for determining the level of proficiency suited to the particular courses based on individual student skill level. Proficiency testing documents ability to use language, using all skills, and evaluates the likelihood of success in a particular course and may or may not be used for credit, depending on the circumstances.

The following notes unique elements or insights into the treatment of these credits and other prior learning by the two systems.

MnSCU: Current Assessment Practices

CLEP (College Level Examination Program) credits are required by statute to be given full recognition at MnSCU colleges and universities. Advanced Placement is also recognized, although not with equal weight throughout the System. Credit for Prior Learning within the MnSCU system is supported by [Policy 3.35](#) which requires each institution to “provide students with opportunities to demonstrate college and university-level learning gained in non-credit or experiential settings and to establish consistent practices among all system colleges and universities for evaluating and granting undergraduate credit for such learning.” Credit for Prior Learning is designed to:

- Acknowledge that students learn and acquire competency through varied means
- Provide mechanisms for students to demonstrate competency in addition to traditional coursework
- Provide students affordable ways of demonstrating competency in different content areas
- Encourage and accelerate degree completion

University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts: Current Assessment Practices

The University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts has the following elements in place to recognize student proficiency:

- The Language Testing Program offers a Language Proficiency Exam (LPE) in all four modalities: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. This exam tests at the intermediate level and is available in most languages taught at the university.
- Students who come to campus proficient in a language not taught at the university may take the Individualized Language Assessment (ILA) in two modalities: Speaking and Writing. This exam tests to the intermediate level.
- Students who pass the LPE or ILA may complete the second language requirement without taking any courses.
- The Language Testing Program also offers an Entrance Proficiency Exam (EPT) which assists with the placement of French, German and Spanish within the first two years.
- Some language programs restrict access to first semester courses to true beginners only.
- Testing out of a course through the LPE or other exam does not provide automatic retroactive credit. However, students may apply for retroactive credit if they pass the next course in the sequence and earn a C- or higher. Retroactive credit may not be earned for first semester courses.
- A Certificate of Advanced-Level Proficiency is available for students of Spanish. This certificate program includes an ACTFL exam in all four modalities: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking.

The variation within MnSCU and the University of Minnesota systems allows individual campuses to maintain regional differences and distinct personalities, while still facilitating a rigorous learning environment for students.

Determinations

Summary

As discussed above, the legislative sections that define the proficiency expected for award of Certificates or Seals set relatively clear standards. Those standards provide a good basis for mapping proficiency against the four-semester proficiency sequence (*e.g., Spanish 101, 102, 201, 202*) that is used for the vast majority of language instruction both within MnSCU and also at most other colleges and universities.

The following table summarizes the minimum number of semesters of credit that will be awarded for a Certificate or Seal at any MnSCU college or university. Students can

continue as well to use the procedures of individual institutions that assess language proficiency and which may allow award of additional credits.

Summary of Determinations

Seal or Certificate	Proficiency level	Awarded credits
World Language Proficiency Certificate	ACTFL Intermediate-Low	2 semesters
World Language High Proficiency Certificate	ACTFL Intermediate-High	3 semesters
Bilingual or Multilingual Seal	Foreign Service Institute 3	4 semesters per language

Articulation of Determinations

The awarding of credit for World Language Certificates and for Bilingual and Multilingual Seals at MnSCU institutions will be based upon the following:

1. Two semesters of the appropriate World Language credit or American Sign Language credit (up to, but not exceeding, 10 credits) will be awarded for the *World Language Proficiency Certificate*.
2. Three semesters of the appropriate credit or American Sign Language credit (up to, but not exceeding, 15 credits) will be awarded for the *World Language High Proficiency Certificate*.
3. Four semesters of the appropriate credit or American Sign Language credit (up to, but not exceeding, 20 credits) will be awarded for each of the world languages (other than English) represented by the *Bilingual or Multilingual Seal*.

Rationale: All MnSCU institutions have four-semester basic proficiency sequences in languages. The credits awarded per semester vary among institutions, and the maximum for a semester of basic language study is 5 credits. By awarding semesters of credit, the student is placed at the appropriate entry point for further study of that language. Because semesters of academic credit are awarded in the specific language for the Certificate, a student could not earn duplicate credits by repeating semesters of a language for which academic credit had already been awarded.

This approach ensures that the achievements of all students who have earned Certificates or Seals will be recognized at the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. It is important to allow for the award of credits above these minima to address the inherent complexity of language proficiency. Language acquisition is dynamic and

multi-dimensional. Two students who have each been awarded World Languages High Proficiency Certificates may have quite different mixes of proficiency among the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. They may also differ significantly in the degree to which they exceed the minimum. For that reason, the approach of setting a minimum award and allowing assessment for achievement at that level makes sense.

The level of language proficiency required by the legislative statute for the bilingual and multilingual seals is at the FSI Level 3, an extraordinary level for near-native or native speakers. There is concern about awarding additional credit at the college or university level for near-native or native speakers since the courses beyond the first semester courses are content courses (civilization, literature, linguistics, etc.) and cannot be assessed by a language proficiency exam like those included here. For this reason, awarding of credit is limited to four semesters both at system colleges and universities and at the University of Minnesota.

Three additional determinations have been made about the award of credit for certificates and seals.

4. The award of college foreign language or elective credit for Certificates or Seals will be made only upon request of the student. The student may request the award of fewer academic credits for a Seal or Certificate than is indicated above.
Rationale: Under some circumstances, a student could be disadvantaged in the determination of Satisfactory Academic Progress for financial aid purposes by the award of credits that may not satisfy the requirements of his or her program of study. The student should receive advice from an academic advisor before requesting credit for Certificates or Seals, as the credits may constitute excess elective credits in the student's chosen program or major.
5. The Certificate or Seal for which college foreign language or elective credit is being requested must have been earned within 36 months preceding the request.
Rationale: Proficiency in a language is a skill that can be reduced or lost if the language is not used or practiced. The award of academic credit for coursework would not be appropriate if the student no longer has the requisite level of proficiency. A student who earned a Certificate or Seal more than three years ago can still use the regular processes of an institution, such as credit by examination, to demonstrate the requisite proficiency and be awarded credit in keeping with the above guidelines.

6. If an institution does not offer the language covered by a Certificate or Seal, the institution will award a number of credits based upon the number of credits that are earned per semester in the languages that it does teach. For example, if an institution teaches Spanish but has a request to award credits for a World Language Certificate in Chinese, it would award a number of credits equal to what would be earned for two semesters of Spanish.

Each MnSCU institution and the University of Minnesota will apply existing policies and procedures for implementing the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum (MnTC) to determine whether and how the awarded academic credit for certificates and seals will be applied to the MnTC, as stated in current policy (MnSCU Board Policy 3.21 and MnSCU Board Policy 3.37). If comparable credits are not awarded at the institution, they can be granted as credit for prior learning. Each MnSCU institution will apply its own policies and procedures to determine if or how the awarded academic credit for Certificates and Seals will be applied to specific degree, major, or program requirements. When concerns over the impact of number of credits on student financial aid and program/degree credit caps exist, students may decide not to apply their Certificates or Seals for college-level credit.

Recommendations

The faculty and administration at MnSCU colleges and universities are supportive of the Legislature's statute for awarding college and university credit for the World Language Certificates and Bilingual and Multilingual seals. With the legislation and the determinations noted above, Minnesota is at the forefront of the national movement around granting of multilingual and bilingual seals and certificates. Being at the forefront often means addressing unforeseen challenges and breaking new ground on processes and elements for implementation. The following highlight some of the key challenges within the statute that hopefully can be addressed to support implementation.

Assessment

Challenge: For a number of world languages, valid and reliable assessment may not be available. The FSI noted in legislation is not available for general use, and it is essential that the assessments used by schools be valid, reliable, and meet nationally accepted standards (i.e., ACTFL proficiency guidelines for World Languages and SLPI for Sign Language).

Recommendation: Change current language of the statute to address the validity and reliability of assessment instruments and currency by replacing the current text:

“where valid and reliable assessments are unavailable, a school district or charter school may rely on a licensed foreign language teacher or a non-licensed community expert”

with the following:

“when a valid* and reliable, ACTFL-based proficiency assessment is unavailable in a specific language, a school district or charter school must seek an ACTFL trained professional who, in collaboration with either a licensed foreign language teacher or a non-licensed community expert, can conduct a reliable assessment of the student’s overall proficiency and, in the case of sign language or a language without a writing system, that nationally-accepted standards for proficiency evaluation for these language systems be used. (i.e. SLPI for Sign Language).”

*We understand a valid assessment as one that has undergone psychometric analysis, field testing and revision.

Excess Credits

Challenge: If the student’s program has significant credit requirements (e.g., nursing and engineering programs have very tight restrictions on general education and elective credit), students could run into difficulty getting financial aid at the end of their degree.

Recommendation: Students should have the option to request that credit be awarded in their first semester of enrollment at a college or university in the MnSCU system; credit should not be awarded automatically without the student’s consent.

Recency

Challenge: The proficiency levels demonstrated by K-12 students may have occurred early in their K-12 experience, and proficiency may have been lost—or, in the case of elementary students, never have achieved a level to enable college-level language study. Reasonable time limitations must be considered for awarding of credit following assessment.

Recommendation: The demonstration of proficiency must be within 36 months prior to enrolling in the institution awarding credit for prior learning since prior assessments cannot be considered current or valid to meet the standards for credit for prior learning at the college and university level. In cases where there is a lapse of more than 36 months, an enrolled student may petition the institution to take credit by examination to demonstrate proficiency.

Impractically High Standards

Challenge: The proficiency levels of the seals set extraordinarily high standards. It is unlikely that a high school junior or senior would meet the described level for bilingual and multilingual seals according to current language in the statute.

Recommendation: In accordance with the determinations noted above it is recommended that the statute be revised by deleting the following language:

“level 3 functional native proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing on either the Foreign Services Institute language proficiency tests or on equivalent valid and reliable assessments in one or more languages in addition to English. American Sign Language is a language other than English where valid and reliable assessments are unavailable, a school district or charter school may rely on a licensed foreign language immersion teacher or a non-licensed community expert under section A school district or charter school may award elective course credits in world languages to a student who demonstrates the requisite proficiency in a language other than English under this section.”

Intermediate high (written and oral) or Advanced low (written and oral) on the ACTFL proficiency scale (not Superior) is a better fit for the seal. Below is a recommendation of how the legislation can be rewritten to make all of the awards more feasible for students, assessable and significant in terms of earning appropriate credit.

- a) For the Minnesota World Language Proficiency Certificate: Demonstrate Intermediate-Low on the ACTFL scale and Intermediate on the Sign Language SLPI scale.
- b) For the Minnesota World Language Proficiency High Achievement Certificate: Demonstrate Intermediate-Mid on the ACTFL scale or Intermediate Plus on the SLPI scale.
- c) For the State bilingual and multilingual seals: Demonstrate Intermediate High/Advanced Low on the ACTFL scale or Advanced on the SLPI.

- d) For languages that are not currently served by ACTFL proficiency ratings, an equivalent and reliable assessment may be created through collaboration with a language expert trained in ACTFL proficiency assessment and a native speaker or near-native speaker of the language who has a minimum documented level of Advanced on the ACTFL scale in the language being tested or a minimum documented level of Superior on the SLPI scale. The level of proficiency would still reflect the levels outlined in a, b and c above.

Community Experts

Challenge: The legislation currently allows for non-licensed community experts and immersion teachers to assess student proficiency levels when valid instruments are unavailable. This allowance does not provide the kind of validity required for awarding of credit at the college or university level. In an effort to respect the intent of the legislation, immersion teachers and non-licensed community experts need to work collaboratively with an expert who has been trained in ACTFL proficiency assessment that can produce a reliable instrument based on ACTFL proficiency guidelines for languages where a current assessment with national standards is unavailable.

Recommendation: In order to ensure consistency and equity across districts, amend the legislative requirement to state that the assessment be conducted by a licensed foreign language teacher or a non-licensed community expert with support and training from an ACTFL trained professional. A rubric or list that defines the steps required of the community expert should be developed.

Conclusion

The 2014 legislation prompted significant consideration of the means by which we can encourage and recognize the world language proficiency of our students. Our K-12 and higher education institutions are committed to moving forward with recognition of the proficiency of bilingual and multilingual students to support their educational pursuits. We are also committed to working with the Minnesota Legislature in fulfilling its statutory intent and in seeking legislative revisions that will best support Minnesota students.

APPENDIX A

Minnesota 2014 Session Laws, Chapter 272, Article 1, Section 42

Sec. 42. REVIEW OF WORLD LANGUAGE COMPETENCIES. The commissioner of education and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) chancellor, after consulting with the world language faculty at the University of Minnesota and MnSCU, must review the specific competencies a K-12 student masters in attaining a state bilingual seal, multilingual seal, Minnesota World Language Proficiency Certificate, or Minnesota World Language Proficiency High Achievement Certificate under Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.22, subdivisions 1a and 1b and determine credit and course equivalencies for each seal or certificate. The commissioner and the chancellor, or their designees, must report findings, determinations, and any recommendations to the education policy and finance committees of the legislature by February 15, 2015.

Minnesota 2014 Session Laws, Chapter 272, Article 1

Sec. 3 Minnesota Statutes 2012, section 120B.022, is amended to read:

120B.022 ELECTIVE STANDARDS.

Subdivision 1. **Elective standards.** ~~(a)~~ A district must establish its own standards in the following subject areas:

- (1) career and technical education; and
- (2) world languages.

A school district must offer courses in all elective subject areas.

Subd. 1a. Foreign language and culture; proficiency certificates. ~~(b)~~ (a) World languages teachers and other school staff should develop and implement world languages programs that acknowledge and reinforce the language proficiency and cultural awareness that non-English language speakers already possess, and encourage students' proficiency in multiple world languages. Programs under this ~~paragraph~~ section must encompass indigenous American Indian languages and cultures, among other world languages and cultures. The department shall consult with postsecondary institutions in developing related professional development opportunities for purposes of this section.

~~(e)~~ (b) Any Minnesota public, charter, or nonpublic school may award Minnesota World Language Proficiency Certificates or Minnesota World Language Proficiency High Achievement Certificates, consistent with this subdivision.

(c) The Minnesota World Language Proficiency Certificate recognizes students who demonstrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing language skills at the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' Intermediate-Low level on a valid and reliable assessment tool. For languages listed as Category 3 by the United States Foreign Service Institute or Category 4 by the United States Defense Language Institute, the standard is Intermediate-Low for listening and speaking and Novice-High for reading and writing.

(d) The Minnesota World Language Proficiency High Achievement Certificate recognizes students who demonstrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing language skills at the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' Pre-Advanced level for K-12 learners on a valid and reliable assessment tool. For languages listed as Category 3 by the United States Foreign Service Institute or Category 4 by the United States Defense Language Institute, the standard is Pre-Advanced for listening and speaking and Intermediate-Mid for reading and writing.

Subd. 1b. State bilingual and multilingual seals. (a) Consistent with efforts to strive for the world's best workforce under sections 120B.11 and 124D.10, subdivision 8, paragraph (u), and close the academic achievement and opportunity gap under sections 124D.861 and 124D.862, voluntary state bilingual and multilingual seals are established to recognize high school graduates who demonstrate level 3 functional native proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing on either the Foreign Services Institute language proficiency tests or on equivalent valid and reliable assessments in one or more languages in addition to English. American Sign Language is a language other than English for purposes of this subdivision and a world language for purposes of subdivision 1a.

(b) In addition to paragraph (a), to be eligible to receive a seal:

(1) students must satisfactorily complete all required English language arts credits; and

(2) students whose primary language is other than English must demonstrate mastery of Minnesota's English language proficiency standards.

(c) Consistent with this subdivision, a high school graduate who demonstrates functional native proficiency in one language in addition to English is eligible to receive the state bilingual seal. A high school graduate who demonstrates functional native proficiency in more than one language in addition to English is eligible to receive the state multilingual seal.

(d) School districts and charter schools, in consultation with regional centers of excellence under section 120B.115, must give students periodic opportunities to demonstrate their level of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in a language in addition to English. Where valid and reliable assessments are unavailable, a school district or charter school may rely on a licensed foreign language immersion teacher or a nonlicensed community expert under section 122A.25 to assess a student's level of foreign, heritage, or indigenous language proficiency under this section. School districts and charter schools must maintain appropriate records to identify high school graduates eligible to receive the state bilingual or multilingual seal. The school district or charter school must affix the appropriate seal to the transcript of each high school graduate who meets the requirements of this subdivision and may affix the seal to the

student's diploma. A school district or charter school must not charge the high school graduate a fee for this seal.

(e) A school district or charter school may award elective course credits in world languages to a student who demonstrates the requisite proficiency in a language other than English under this section.

(f) A school district or charter school may award community service credit to a student who demonstrates level 3 functional native proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in a language other than English and who participates in community service activities that are integrated into the curriculum, involve the participation of teachers, and support biliteracy in the school or local community.

(g) The commissioner must develop a Web page for the electronic delivery of these seals. The commissioner must list on the Web page those assessments that are equivalent to the Foreign Services Institute language proficiency tests.

(h) The colleges and universities of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system must award foreign language credits to a student who receives a state bilingual seal or a state multilingual seal under this subdivision and may award foreign language credits to a student who receives a Minnesota World Language Proficiency Certificate or a Minnesota World Language Proficiency High Achievement Certificate under subdivision 1a.

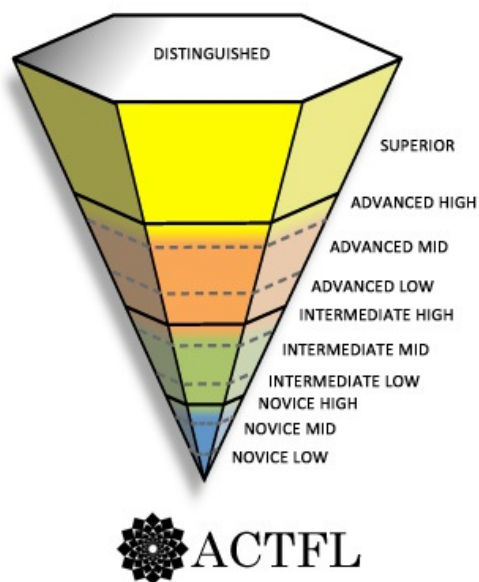
Subd. 2. Local assessments. A district must use a locally selected assessment to determine if a student has achieved an elective standard.

EFFECTIVE DATE. This section is effective the day following final enactment and applies to the 2014-2015 school year and later, except subdivision 1b, paragraph (h), is effective for students enrolling in a MnSCU system college or university in the 2015-2016 school year or later.

APPENDIX B - Crosswalk of Levels of Proficiency on Recognized Assessments

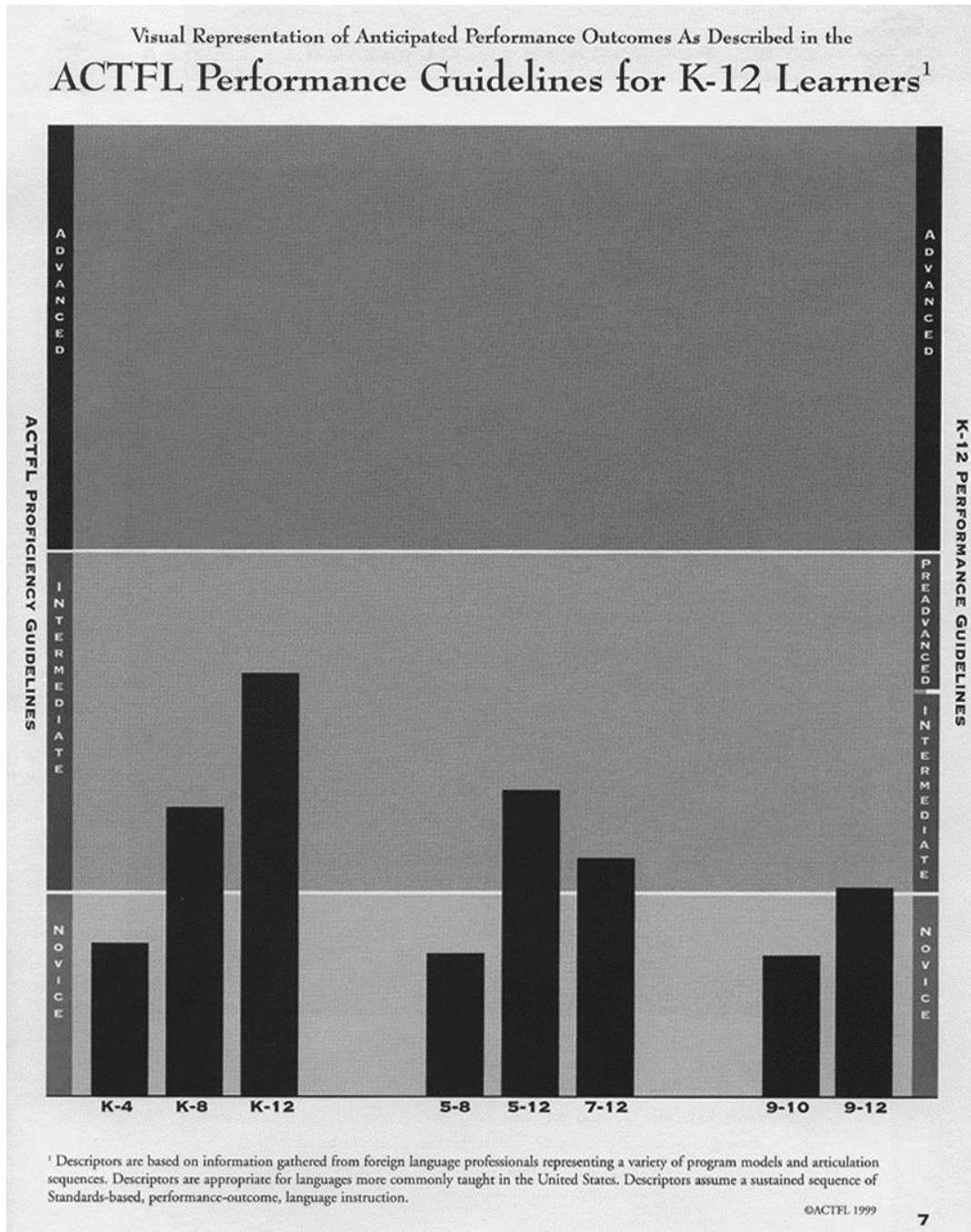
American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages	Interagency Language Roundtable ILR/STANAG	CEFR
S	3	C2
AH	2+	C1
AM	2+	B2+
AL	2	B2
IH	1+	B1+
IM	1+	B1
IL	1	A2
NH	0+	A1

The graphic of ACTFL Proficiency Levels is intended to illustrate levels of proficiency and the breadth and depth of language proficiency at the Superior (ILR 3/FSI 3) level.



[Read more information about the ACTFL proficiency guidelines.](#)

The chart below shows proficiency expectations of students learning a language in a world language program in a school setting where language is learned as a subject rather than the medium with which content is learned as is the case in immersion programs.



The ACTFL proficiency guidelines and the ASL assessment have broad recognition and can be aligned to college equivalencies.

The Articulation Project, a statewide CARLA (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition) research project funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the Department of Children, Families and Learning and other grants, also determined that after four years of continuous language study, high school students generally arrive at Intermediate-Low proficiency. This level is generally accepted by higher education as the level required for entrance into third semester language study. [Read about Minnesota's Articulation Project.](#)

The proficiency level of students in immersion programs is not reflected in the above chart as immersion students acquire language at a faster rate for the purpose of learning subject matter. The legislation that established the world language proficiency certificate sought to address language proficiency levels of immersion students with the high achievement certificate.

While the certificates have seen very little use in the past, the increased interest over the last two years on the part of Chinese immersion programs show that students in grades four and five are proficient at Intermediate-Low and some at Intermediate-Mid. Students in immersion programs who are able to continue to study language in the few programs that offer continuation for immersion students would be expected to arrive at an Advanced proficiency level by the end of high school. Research on the levels of proficiency immersion students can attain when they are able to continue learning in the language after elementary school is being conducted as immersion students have moved to high school.

APPENDIX B – ACTFL guidance on proficiency levels required for various employment occupations.

ACTFL Level	US Gov. FSI	Language Functions	Corresponding Professions/Positions	Examples of Who Is Likely to Function at the Level?
Distinguished	5 4	Ability to tailor language to specific audience, persuade, negotiate. Deal with nuance and subtlety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diplomat, Contract Negotiator, International Specialist, Translator/Interpreter, Intelligence Specialist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly articulate, professionally specialized native speakers; • L2 learners with extended (17 years) and current professional and/or educational experience in the target culture
Superior	3	Discuss topics extensively, support opinions, hypothesize. Deal with linguistically unfamiliar situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University professor, Business Executive, Lawyer, Judge, Financial Advisor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-educated native speakers • Educated L2 learners with extended professional and/or educational experience in the target language environment
Advanced High Advanced Mid Advanced Low	2+ 2	Narrate and describe in past, present and future and deal effectively with an unanticipated complication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physician, Military Linguist, Senior Consultant, Human Resources Personnel, Financial Broker, Translation Officer, Marketing Manager, Communications Consultant. • Fraud Specialist, Account Executive, Court Stenographer /Interpreter, Benefits Specialist, Technical Service Agent, Collection Representative, Estimating Coordinator • Customer Service Agent, Social Worker, Claims Processor, K-12 Language Teacher, Police Officer, Maintenance Administrator, Billing Clerk, Legal Secretary, Legal Receptionist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L2 learners with graduate degrees in language- related area and extended educational experience in target environment • Heritage speakers, informal learners, non-academic learners who have significant contact with language • Undergraduate language majors with year-long study abroad experience

Intermediate High Intermediate Mid Intermediate Low	1+ 1	Create with language, initiate, maintain and bring to a close simple conversations by asking and responding to simple questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auto Inspector, Aviation Personnel, Missionary, Tour guide • Cashier, Sales clerk (highly predictable contexts) • Receptionist, Housekeeping staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undergraduate language majors without year-long study abroad experience. • L2 learners after six-eight year sequences of study (AP, etc.) or • four-six semester college sequence • L2 learners after four year high school sequence or two semester college sequence
Novice High Novice Mid Novice Low	0+ 0	Communicate minimally with formulaic and rote utterances, lists and phrases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no corresponding profession at this level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • L2 learners after two years of high school language study

(Used with permission)

APPENDIX C

Cost of Assessment

The costs related to the ACTFL proficiency assessment for Bilingual and Multilingual Seals:

- Oral Proficiency Interview: \$139.00
- Oral Proficiency Interview Computerized: \$70.00
- Writing Proficiency Test: \$70.00
- Listening Proficiency Test: \$30.00
- Reading Proficiency Test: \$30.00

The costs related to assessment for World Language Proficiency Certificates:

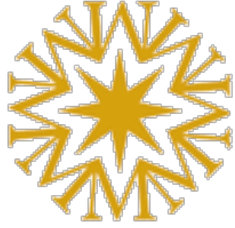
- ELPAC for French, German and Spanish: \$31.80 per language and level (\$8.95 per skill)
- STAMP for Arabic, Chinese (Traditional and Simplified) English, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Spanish– \$18.00 per student with large group rates available.
- AAPPL – ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (Novice to Advanced) – \$20.00 per student for reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- ASL – The cost of the ASLPI evaluation is \$165 and the cost of the SLPI varies but generally is around \$150.

An alternative assessment approach to ACTFL OPI assessments could be to provide ACTFL proficiency training to language teachers and community experts to enable them to assess at the required proficiency levels.

Approximating overall costs of assessments is difficult as MDE does not have data on the number of students taking a language at various levels in schools. Additionally, it is not possible to ascertain the interest of students who will want to earn a seal.

Based on the 2011-2012 data, the last available count of students studying a world language, and considering that many, possibly two-thirds of students will not continue past level two and fewer to level four, a high guestimate would be that possibly 5,000 students could ask for proficiency testing to earn a world language proficiency certificate.

Source: 2013 Fiscal Year Report to the Legislature, page 27.



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