

118TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# H. R. 7007

To award grants to States to establish or improve, and carry out, Seal of Biliteracy programs to recognize high-level student proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in both English and a second language, and early language programs.

---

## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 17, 2024

Ms. BROWNLEY (for herself, Mr. CONNOLLY, Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin, Mr. PANETTA, and Ms. SÁNCHEZ) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce

---

## A BILL

To award grants to States to establish or improve, and carry out, Seal of Biliteracy programs to recognize high-level student proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in both English and a second language, and early language programs.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Biliteracy Education  
5 Seal and Teaching Act” or the “BEST Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1           (1) The people of the United States celebrate  
2 cultural and linguistic diversity and seek to prepare  
3 students with skills to succeed in the 21st century.

4           (2) It is fitting to commend the dedication of  
5 students who have achieved proficiency in multiple  
6 languages and to encourage their peers to follow in  
7 their footsteps.

8           (3) The congressionally requested Commission  
9 on Language Learning, in its 2017 report “Amer-  
10 ica’s Languages: Investing in Language Education  
11 for the 21st Century”, notes the pressing national  
12 need for more people of the United States who are  
13 proficient in 2 or more languages for national secu-  
14 rity, economic growth, and the fulfillment of the po-  
15 tential of all people of the United States.

16           (4) The Commission on Language Learning  
17 also notes the extensive cognitive, educational, and  
18 employment benefits deriving from biliteracy.

19           (5) Biliteracy in general correlates with higher  
20 graduation rates, higher grade point averages, high-  
21 er rates of matriculation into higher education, and  
22 higher earnings for all students, regardless of back-  
23 ground.

24           (6) The study of America’s languages in ele-  
25 mentary and secondary schools should be encouraged

1 because it contributes to a student’s cognitive devel-  
2 opment and to the national economy and security.

3 (7) Recognition of student achievement in lan-  
4 guage proficiency will enable institutions of higher  
5 education and employers to readily recognize and ac-  
6 knowledge the valuable expertise of bilingual stu-  
7 dents in academia and the workplace.

8 (8) States such as Utah, Arizona, Washington,  
9 and New Mexico have developed innovative testing  
10 methods for languages, including Native American  
11 languages, where no formal proficiency test currently  
12 exists.

13 (9) The use of proficiency in a government-rec-  
14 ognized official Native American language as the  
15 base language for a Seal of Biliteracy, with pro-  
16 ficiency in any additional partner language dem-  
17 onstrated through tested proficiency, has been suc-  
18 cessfully demonstrated in Hawaii.

19 (10) Students in every State and every school  
20 should be able to benefit from a Seal of Biliteracy  
21 program.

22 **SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.**

23 In this Act:

24 (1) ESEA DEFINITIONS.—The terms “elemen-  
25 tary school”, “English learner”, “local educational

1 agency”, “middle grades”, “secondary school”, and  
2 “State” have the meanings given those terms in sec-  
3 tion 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Edu-  
4 cation Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

5 (2) CLASSICAL LANGUAGE.—The term “clas-  
6 sical language”—

7 (A) means—

8 (i) a language that is no longer spo-  
9 ken; or

10 (ii) a language—

11 (I) the spoken varieties of which  
12 diverge further away from the clas-  
13 sical language over time; and

14 (II) that possesses an inde-  
15 pendent literary tradition and a large  
16 body of ancient written literature; and

17 (B) includes Greek, Latin, Chinese, Arabic,  
18 and Sanskrit.

19 (3) NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGE.—The term  
20 “Native American language” has the meaning given  
21 the term in section 103 of the Native American Lan-  
22 guages Act (25 U.S.C. 2902).

23 (4) SEAL OF BILITERACY PROGRAM.—The term  
24 “Seal of Biliteracy program” means any program  
25 described in section 4(a) that is established or im-

1 proved, and carried out, with funds received under  
2 this Act.

3 (5) SECOND LANGUAGE.—The term “second  
4 language”—

5 (A) means any language other than—

6 (i) English; or

7 (ii) in a case where the provisions of  
8 paragraph (2) of section 4(a) apply, the  
9 Native American language of proficiency  
10 described in such paragraph; and

11 (B) includes Braille, American Sign Lan-  
12 guage, or a classical language.

13 (6) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means  
14 the Secretary of Education.

15 **SEC. 4. GRANTS FOR STATE SEAL OF BILITERACY PRO-**  
16 **GRAMS.**

17 (a) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM.—

18 (1) IN GENERAL.—From amounts made avail-  
19 able under subsection (f), the Secretary shall award  
20 grants, on a competitive basis, to States to enable  
21 the States to establish or improve, and carry out,  
22 Seal of Biliteracy programs and early language pro-  
23 grams that lead to a Seal of Biliteracy to recognize  
24 student proficiency in both English and a second  
25 language, which—

1 (A) shall be demonstrated through pro-  
2 ficiency in speaking and writing in both lan-  
3 guages; and

4 (B) may also be demonstrated through  
5 reading and listening in both languages.

6 (2) INCLUSION OF NATIVE AMERICAN LAN-  
7 GUAGES.—Notwithstanding paragraph (1), each Seal  
8 of Biliteracy program shall contain provisions allow-  
9 ing the use of Native American languages, including  
10 allowing speakers of any Native American language  
11 recognized as official by any American government,  
12 including any Tribal government, to use equivalent  
13 proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in the  
14 Native American language in lieu of proficiency in  
15 speaking, reading, and writing in English.

16 (3) DURATION.—A grant awarded under this  
17 section shall be for a period of 2 years, and may be  
18 renewed at the discretion of the Secretary.

19 (4) RENEWAL.—At the end of a grant term, a  
20 State that receives a grant under this section may  
21 reapply for a grant under this section.

22 (5) LIMITATIONS.—A State shall not receive  
23 more than 1 grant under this section at any time.

24 (6) RETURN OF UNSPENT GRANT FUNDS.—  
25 Each State that receives a grant under this section

1 shall return any unspent grant funds not later than  
2 6 months after the date on which the term for the  
3 grant ends.

4 (b) GRANT PROGRAM.—A State that desires a grant  
5 under this section shall submit an application to the Sec-  
6 retary at such time, in such manner, and containing such  
7 information and assurances as the Secretary may require,  
8 including—

9 (1) a description of the criteria a student must  
10 meet to demonstrate proficiency for the State Seal  
11 of Biliteracy in both languages, which—

12 (A) shall include proficiency criteria for the  
13 2 productive skills of speaking and writing; and

14 (B) may include proficiency criteria for the  
15 skills of reading and listening;

16 (2) a detailed description of the State’s plan—

17 (A) to ensure that English learners and  
18 former English learners are included in the  
19 State Seal of Biliteracy program;

20 (B) to ensure equitable access to the State  
21 Seal of Biliteracy program for students with  
22 identified disabilities, including vision and hear-  
23 ing impairments and cognitive or learning dis-  
24 abilities, that preclude demonstration of lan-

1           guage proficiency in one of the skills identified  
2           in paragraph (1);

3           (C) to ensure that—

4                 (i) all languages, including Native  
5                 American languages and American Sign  
6                 Language, can be tested for the State Seal  
7                 of Biliteracy program; and

8                 (ii) Native American language speak-  
9                 ers and learners are included in the State  
10                Seal of Biliteracy program, including stu-  
11                dents at tribally controlled schools and at  
12                schools funded by the Bureau of Indian  
13                Education; and

14           (D) to reach elementary school and middle  
15           grades students (including eligible students de-  
16           scribed in subsection (c)(2), heritage language  
17           learners, and English learners), their parents,  
18           and schools with information regarding the  
19           State Seal of Biliteracy program;

20           (3) an assurance that a student who meets the  
21           requirements under paragraph (1) and subsection  
22           (c) receives—

23                 (A) a permanent seal or other marker on  
24                 the student's secondary school diploma or its  
25                 equivalent; or



1 (B) documentation of proficiency on the  
2 student's official academic transcript; and

3 (4) an assurance that a student is not charged  
4 a fee for providing information under subsection  
5 (c)(1).

6 (c) STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN A SEAL OF  
7 BILITERACY PROGRAM.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—To participate in a Seal of  
9 Biliteracy program, a student shall provide informa-  
10 tion to the State that serves the student at such  
11 time, in such manner, and including such informa-  
12 tion and assurances as the State may require, in-  
13 cluding an assurance that the student has met the  
14 criteria established by the State under subsection  
15 (b)(1).

16 (2) STUDENT ELIGIBILITY FOR PARTICIPA-  
17 TION.—A student who gained proficiency in a second  
18 language outside of school may apply to the State of  
19 the student's residence under paragraph (1) to par-  
20 ticipate in a Seal of Biliteracy program.

21 (d) USE OF FUNDS.—Grant funds made available  
22 under this section shall be used for—

23 (1) the administrative costs of establishing or  
24 improving, and carrying out, a Seal of Biliteracy

1 program that meets the requirements of subsection  
2 (b);

3 (2) public outreach and education about the  
4 Seal of Biliteracy program; and

5 (3) subgrants to local educational agencies for  
6 language educator professional development, public  
7 outreach, and subsidizing baseline and final Seal of  
8 Biliteracy testing for low-income students.

9 (e) REPORT.—Not later than 18 months after receiv-  
10 ing a grant under this section, a State shall issue a report  
11 to the Secretary describing the implementation of the Seal  
12 of Biliteracy program for which the State received the  
13 grant.

14 (f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There  
15 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section  
16 \$10,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2024 through 2028.

○