All Aboard!

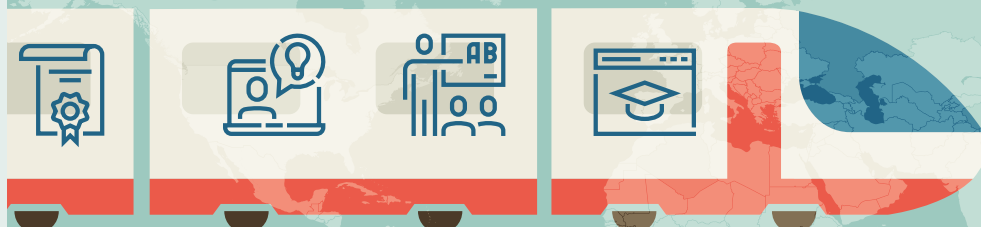**DESTINATION:**

Minnesota Bilingual Seal with Performance at Proficiency Levels Along the Way

GOLD SEAL
Intermediate High proficiency

By Megan Budke and Karen Nickel

The Implementation of the Minnesota Bilingual Seal in 2015 forever changed the design of world language programs in our state. We celebrate that state law now recognizes all languages as assets, not deficits, for our learners and their families. For the first time, Minnesota schools can honor not only the languages that we instruct in our institutions, but *all* of the numerous languages that our learners come to schools with every single day.

We are proud to share that by demonstrating proficiency in the Interpretive reading and listening, Interpersonal speaking, and Presentational writing communicative modes, learners not only earn a Seal but also college credits at Minnesota state colleges. The Bilingual/Multilingual Seal recognizes that *all* languages, regardless of where and how they are learned, have value. The Seal creates an inclusive environment where all are welcomed and celebrated.

The implementation of the Minnesota Bilingual Seal also means that every world language program now has a clear, measurable end goal. Rather than quantifying language by the number of years of instruction, our programs aim to reach Intermediate High proficiency for the Gold Seal, and Advanced Low proficiency for the Platinum Seal.

Yet this then begs the question—how do we prepare learners to reach these proficiency levels? This is how we crafted the journey with teachers across four languages, levels Novice to Advanced, from elementary to high school, working together to move *all* learners along the path to the level of proficiency required to earn the Seal.

Photos: Jeffery Demars

PLATINUM SEAL
Advanced Low proficiency
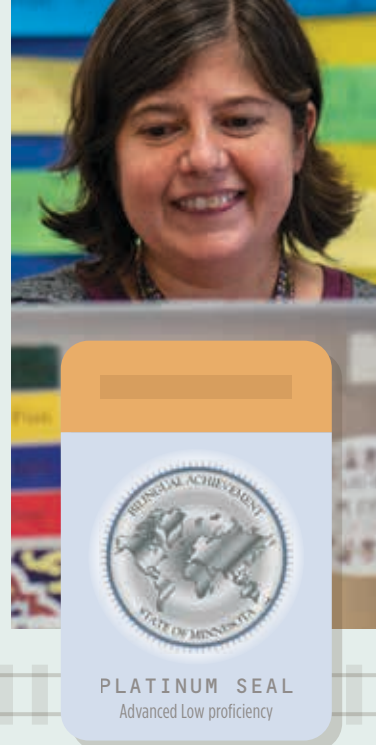
Program Design with the End in Mind

Setting goals for each level of our learners' growth lets us know that they are on target to meet the expectations of the Bilingual Seal. Every program needs a realistic way to gauge what learners should be expected to learn within the restrictions of the instructional hours.

Using the proficiency expectations charts from the *North Carolina World Language Essential Standards* (2010), we match instructional hours with expected proficiency levels. In addition, we agree to a standardized scoring system that transcends languages and levels.

The book *Implementing Integrated Performance Assessments* (2013) provides us with performance rubrics based on the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* (2012). The rubrics focus our scoring on what learners "can do" with the language within an Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) framework and provides teachers with guidance on how to move learners from Novice to Advanced. All levels, regardless of language, use these performance rubrics, which leads to consistent scoring in a department that spans 13 different buildings.

We are not at this time providing end-of-course assessments to determine proficiency achievement. However, by utilizing the IPA framework combined with our common performance rubrics, teachers are able to identify where each learner is on the journey toward the level of proficiency required to earn the Seal. They can then provide coaching, practice, and opportunities to demonstrate growth to meet the threshold of that proficiency level. To illustrate, we provide samples of scored learner work in each communicative mode and the feedback given to learners that coaches them to the next proficiency level.

Interpretive Integrated Performance Assessment and Scoring Guide

The interpretive IPA template guides learners to make meaning from a text/audio/video through a series of literacy-based literal and interpretive tasks. The template (*tinyurl.com/yb3mqy5b*) and scoring guide (*tinyurl.com/y63yczfq*) from *Implementing Integrated*

Performance Assessments (2013) and published on the Ohio Department of Education webpage remains the same with each level of proficiency. The chosen texts increase in complexity as the proficiency level increases.

In this sample (*tinyurl.com/y6nrcvkh*), Novice level learners read a text (*tinyurl.com/y44fvtxl*) to complete each portion of the assessment template. Using the interpretive template and scoring guide, the learners would be assessed in all categories. However, for the purpose of this article, we will focus on the *Supporting Details* aspect of the rubric to illustrate how the rubric is used to assess the work and give learners feedback to promote their continued learning.

The learner in this sample is able to identify the majority of the details in the text, but not all of them. The learner supports each detail by providing information from the text as evidence of his/her/their reasoning. Because of this, we rate the learner as *Meets Expectations Strong*.

To provide learners with effective feedback, we align to key ideas from Grant Wiggins: goal-referenced, tangible and transparent, actionable, and user friendly. We provide evidence of strengths and examples of where learners can improve. When addressing areas for improvement, we write feedback in the form of questions to invite the learner to engage in the feedback process through reflection and personalization.

Feedback for this learner might include:

- Evidence of strengths: Providing multiple pieces of evidence for types of classes and origin that show a deeper understanding of the text;
- Area(s) for improvement: How might you use key words to locate potential evidence for supporting details? (*For example, the learner identified the word **uniform** in key word recognition, but was not able to provide information from the text for the supporting detail **students who wear uniforms**.*)

Learners might practice this skill by identifying key words that help them make meaning of a text. They could then craft their own supporting details using their identified key words showing that they now understand more about the connection between *Key Words* and *Supporting Details*.

As learners progress to the Intermediate level, the texts become more complex, often with less visual support, but the template and scoring guide remain the same. The template provides scaffolded supports at various proficiency levels. At the Novice level, the template suggests providing an inference statement for learners to list any evidence from the text that would help them determine whether it's true or false. At the Intermediate level, the template suggests posing an open-ended inference question that learners answer using textual evidence.

Notice that the feedback is given in the context of one particular assessment but can be applied on future assessments that the learner attempts. Language skills are constantly in flux, learners prove their skills in a number of different contexts on assessments throughout a term, semester, or year. Instead of having learners retake assessments, learners continue to learn, and with each new assessment, they naturally get multiple opportunities to show what they can now do in the same skill areas. This shows that taking risks and growth are valued and that every learner makes progress. All learners are always (re)assessed at their current level of understanding and ability.

Interpersonal/Presentational Integrated Performance Assessment and Scoring Guides

The integrated performance assessment rubrics (Novice through Advanced) measure performance toward proficiency in what language functions a learner can perform, how well the learner is understood with attention to the complexity of language, and how vocabulary and grammar play into the learner's control of the language to accomplish the task.

Both the Interpersonal, spontaneous negotiated meaning, and the Presentational, practiced communication for an audience, are measured in the areas of *Language Function*, *Comprehensibility*, *Text Type*, and *Language Control*. The two modes of communication differ in measuring *Impact* in the Presentational mode and *Communication Strategies* in the Interpersonal mode.

Interpersonal Integrated Performance Assessment and Scoring Guide

In the transcript of a sample of a spoken Interpersonal IPA at the Intermediate level of proficiency (*tinyurl.com/y4tot8ll*), the learners are responding to the prompt:

> *How do the definitions of "beauty" vary across cultures? Using as much vocabulary from the unit as possible, discuss the question with your partner. Use any examples of art, as well as experiences from your past, present, and future as examples to help you demonstrate your best (target language).*

Using the Intermediate High rubric (*tinyurl.com/y3tkxypq*) from *Implementing Integrated Performance Assessments* (2013), learners would be assessed in all five categories. However, for the purpose of this article, we will focus on the *Communication Strategies* aspect of the rubric to illustrate how the rubrics are used to assess the work and give learners feedback to promote their continued learning (see Figure 1).

In this conversation, we see that both learners use strategies to maintain the conversation. The learners demonstrate their ability to listen to their partner's ideas and build upon them, adding how they might agree with a statement and also adding more depth to a point of view, providing further evidence to support it. They both move beyond routine tasks and social situations by discussing an abstract topic (beauty). Both also demonstrate ways they advance the conversation once an idea has been fully supported: the male learner uses an open-ended question to start the conversation and helps support his partner by providing the phrase *more natural* to summarize and add to her idea. The female learner uses the phrase *So, to continue …* to move the conversation to the next point of discussion. For these reasons, we rate both of these learners as *Exceeds Expectations*.

Interpersonal Intermediate High Rubric

	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations Strong	Meets Expectations Minimal	Does Not Meet Expectations
Communication Strategies Quality of engagement and interactivity; how one participates in the conversation and advances it; strategies for negotiating meaning in the face of breakdown of communication.	Maintains conversation. May use communicative strategies such as rephrasing and circumlocution.	Converses with ease and confidence when dealing with routine tasks and social situations. May clarify by paraphrasing.	Responds to direct questions and requests for information. Asks a variety of questions to obtain simple information but tends to function reactively. May clarify by restating.	Responds to direct questions and requests for information. Asks a few appropriate questions but is primarily reactive. May try to restate in the face of miscommunication.

Figure 1

Feedback for these learners might include:

- Evidence of strengths: Moving beyond routine tasks by showing the ability to discuss an abstract topic, responding to each other and advancing the conversation together;
- Area(s) for improvement: How might you paraphrase more to show your understanding which then allows you to dig deeper? How might you dig deeper using the skills you have (circumlocution) to talk about more complex issues that require critical thinking?

Here also, feedback is given in the context of one particular assessment, but the learner is encouraged to apply the learning in the next assessment. All learners have the opportunity to work toward the next level by deepening the paraphrasing in the next assessment.

Learners working to improve could engage in some formal practice of handing off and enriching the conversation with key phrases such as: *Which parts do you agree with? I heard you say …, and I agree with … but not …. Do you also think ….? Is that similar to …?*

Presentational Integrated Performance Assessment and Scoring Guide

To the right is a sample of a written Presentational IPA at the Intermediate level of proficiency. The learner is responding to the prompt:

You have applied and been accepted to study abroad! Your host family would like to know more about you and your travel experience to prepare the best experience for you. Write them a letter to introduce yourself. Describe your family/school/community, and your travel experience. If you can, try to include your knowledge of your host family's country/community to further connect with them.

Using the Intermediate High rubric (*tinyurl.com/y3c778y2*) from *Implementing Integrated Performance Assessments* (2013), the learner would be assessed in all five categories. However, for the purpose of

this article, we will focus on the *Impact* aspect of the rubric to illustrate how the rubrics are used to assess the work and give learners feedback to promote their continued learning (see Figure 2).

Dear Mr and Mrs Garcia:

My name is Alex. I am from Cornish, New Hampshire, and I go to Hartford High School in Vermont. **A little about me**, I play 2 sports, **soccer and lacrosse**. I have a good family, and I **really** love my dogs. I ride mountain bike **in the summer** and I ski **in the winter**. I have 4 friends, my girlfriend, my friend Ben, **who also speaks Spanish**, my brother and my best friend **from Cornish**. **This a little about me**.

I like my school **a lot**. The community is **very** good. It's a **peaceful urban** town. My school has **a lot** of opportunities to travel **to other countries**. I went to Peru **for a week with a group of 20 people**. We worked with kids **from a Peruvian school**. I taught math **to the kids**. I love the experience.

My plan **for after school** I will go to a university and I will do an exchange program to Spain or another Latin American country. I want to visit Spain **for a semester**.

Thanks for your time and this opportunity.

Sincerely, Alex

In this sample, we see that the learner organized his writing into discrete paragraphs where similar ideas are grouped. The learner adds rich details such as *a lot*, *very*, *in the summer* as well as additional descriptive information to maintain the attention of the reader (*we emphasized these additional details in bold*). For this reason, we rate this sample at *Meets Expectations Strong*.

Presentational Intermediate High Rubric

	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations Strong	Meets Expectations Weak	Does Not Meet Expectations
Impact Clarity, organization, and depth of presentation; degree to which presentation maintains attention and interest of audience.	Presented in a clear and organized manner. Presentation illustrates originality, rich details, and an unexpected feature that captures the interest and attention of the audience.	Presented in a clear and organized manner. Presentation illustrates originality and features rich details, visuals, and/or organization of the text to maintain audience's attention and/or interest.	Presented in a clear and organized manner. Some effort to maintain audience's attention through visuals, organization of the text, and/or details.	Presentation may be either unclear or unorganized. Minimal to no effort to maintain audience's attention.

Figure 2

Feedback to this learner might include:

- Evidence of strengths: Adding additional details to the writing to maintain the attention of the audience;
- Area(s) for improvement: How might you further develop the idea of your travel in Peru to create an unexpected feature to exceed expectations? This idea adds interest to your writing but does not yet really evoke a reaction from your audience.

Notice again that the feedback is given on one particular assessment, but is applied to the next assessment. On the next assessment, the learner would continue to add rich details that keep an audience engaged, and also add an unexpected feature to really capture audience attention. In this way, learners are motivated because they know that they are all (re)assessed at their current level of understanding and ability.

Improv activities can be a great way to help learners develop their creativity in language and encourage them to include unexpected features. Role-playing a normal day, but having learners use specific words like *elephant*, *claustrophobia*, or *bungee-jumping*, might help learners see how to incorporate believable, but unexpected features into their new presentational skills.

Program Results

When learners conclude their language learning experience, we offer multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency achievement through assessments such as Advanced Placement Language & Culture Exams, the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL), the **STA**ndards-based **M**easurement of **P**roficiency (STAMP), and proficiency assessments for less commonly taught languages created by the Minnesota Department of Education.

In 2019, of the 107 learners who completed these assessments, 95 learners (89%) earned World Language Certificates and Bilingual/Multilingual Seal achievements in Chinese, French, German, and Spanish, our language program offerings. We credit this high success rate largely to our programwide approach to guiding students on their journey to proficiency using IPAs, scoring guides, and effective feedback techniques.

It's also important to note that 45 additional students have earned World Language Certificates and/or Bilingual/Multilingual Seal achievements in Arabic, Hindi, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Tamil, Thai, and Vietnamese since 2016. While these languages are not taught in our district, they represent some of the numerous languages that our students come to our schools with every day. For these learners, a Certificate or Seal offers proof or validation that their language is seen as an asset, not a deficit.

Recent research from Davin and Hancock support this feeling: "Overall, the [Seal of Biliteracy] was valuable to linguistically diverse students for the assessment piece of the award that could prove their language ability to themselves and to others" (2020).

Additionally, we have found that our approach to guiding students on their journey to proficiency empowers all language programs, including community and heritage language programs.

In 2016, we partnered with the Minnesota Department of Education and the MNTS Tamil school to develop proficiency testing procedures and assessments that resulted in awarding the first Tamil Bilingual Seal in the United States. The MNTS Tamil school worked tirelessly over the next two years with the Minnesota Department of Education to create the first Minnesota Tamil assessment in alignment with the ACTFL proficiency guidelines.

During this time, Megan Budke worked with the program directors and staff to provide curriculum frameworks guided by the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, the IPA framework, and the same scoring guides from *Implementing Integrated Performance Assessments* (2013). As a result, 21 students have earned the Seal in Tamil since 2016.

The MNTS Tamil school is proof that the same programmatic approach that leads our students to succeed in our public school world language program transcends languages. When we craft our journey around what learners *can do* with the language and provide teachers with guidance to move learners from Novice to Advanced we help *all* learners get on board (the train) to proficiency.

Megan Budke is a Spanish teacher and World Language Coordinator for Wayzata Public Schools, Wayzata, Minnesota.

Karen Nickel is a German teacher, PLC coach, and former World Language Coordinator for Wayzata Public Schools, Wayzata, Minnesota.

RESOURCES:

Adair-Hauck, B., Glisan, E. W., & Troyan, F. J. (2013). *Implementing integrated performance assessments*. Alexandria, VA: ACTFL.

ACTFL (2012). *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012*. Retrieved from www. actfl.org/sites/default.files/pdfs/public/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012_FINAL.pdf

Davin, K.J., Hancock, C.R., & Mariyappan, S. (2019). Growing Tamil in Minnesota through the Seal of Biliteracy. *The Language Educator*, *14*(4), 38-41.

Hancock, C.R., & Davin, K.J. (2020) A comparative case study: Administrators' and students' perceptions of the Seal of Biliteracy. *Foreign Language Annals*. *53*(3), 458-477.

Ohio Department of Education (n.d.). Rubrics for world languages. Retrieved from http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Learning-in-Ohio/Foreign-Language/World-Languages-Model-Curriculum/World-Languages-Model-Curriculum-Framework/Instructional-Strategies/Scoring-Guidelines-for-World-Languages

Public Schools of North Carolina (2010). North Carolina world language essential standards: Classical languages, dual & heritage languages, modern languages. Retrieved from www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/worldlanguages/scos/world-language.pdf

Wiggins, G. (2012). Seven keys to effective feedback. *Educational Leadership*, *70*, 10-16.