

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 3119

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

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 5, 2019

Ms. BROWNLEY of California (for herself, Mr. CARBAJAL, Mrs. NAPOLITANO, Mr. CÁRDENAS, and Mr. LANGEVIN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and Labor

A BILL

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

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 study of world languages in elementary
9 and secondary schools should be encouraged because
10 it contributes to a student's cognitive development
11 and to the national economy and security.

12 (4) The congressionally requested Commission
13 on Language Learning, in its 2017 report "Amer-
14 ica's Languages: Investing in Language Education
15 for the 21st Century," notes the pressing national
16 need for more Americans proficient in two or more
17 languages, for national security, economic growth,
18 and the fulfillment of the potential of all Americans.

19 (5) Recognition of student achievement in lan-
20 guage proficiency will enable institutions of higher
21 education and employers to readily recognize and ac-
22 knowledge the valuable expertise of bilingual stu-
23 dents in academia and the workplace.

24 (6) California has pioneered the first State sys-
25 tem in the Nation to recognize students for achiev-

1 ing proficiency in multiple languages. In 2012, Cali-
2 fornia awarded a Seal of Biliteracy to over 10,000
3 graduating high school seniors in 37 school districts.
4 By 2019, 35 States and the District of Columbia
5 will have adopted the Seal of Biliteracy.

6 (7) Students in every State should be able to
7 benefit from a Seal of Biliteracy program.

8 **SEC. 3. STATE SEAL OF BILITERACY PROGRAM.**

9 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of Education
10 shall award grants to States to establish or improve, and
11 carry out a Seal of Biliteracy program to recognize stu-
12 dent proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in both
13 English and a second language.

14 (b) GRANT APPLICATION.—In order to receive a
15 grant under this section, a State shall submit an applica-
16 tion to the Secretary at such time, in such manner, and
17 containing such information and assurances as the Sec-
18 retary may require, including—

19 (1) a description of the criteria a student must
20 meet to demonstrate proficiency in speaking, read-
21 ing, and writing in both English and a second lan-
22 guage;

23 (2) assurances that a student who meets the re-
24 quirements under paragraph (1)—

1 (A) receives a permanent seal or other
2 marker on the student's secondary school di-
3 ploma or its equivalent; and

4 (B) receives documentation of proficiency
5 in the student's official academic transcript;
6 and

7 (3) assurances that a student is not charged a
8 fee for submitting an application under subsection
9 (c).

10 (c) STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN A SEAL OF
11 BILITERACY PROGRAM.—To participate in a Seal of
12 Biliteracy program, a student must submit an application
13 to the State that serves the student at such time, in such
14 manner, and containing such information and assurances
15 as the State may require, including assurances that the
16 student—

17 (1) will receive a secondary school diploma or
18 its equivalent in the year the student submits an ap-
19 plication; and

20 (2) has met the criteria established by the State
21 under subsection (b)(1).

22 (d) STUDENT ELIGIBILITY FOR APPLICATION.—A
23 student who gained proficiency in a second language out-
24 side of school may apply to participate in a Seal of
25 Biliteracy program under subsection (c).

1 (e) USE OF FUNDS.—Grant funds made available
2 under this section shall be used for—

3 (1) the administrative costs of establishing or
4 improving, and carrying out a Seal of Biliteracy pro-
5 gram; and

6 (2) public outreach and education about such
7 program.

8 (f) GRANT TERMS.—

9 (1) DURATION.—A grant awarded under this
10 section shall be for a period of 2 years, and may be
11 renewed at the discretion of the Secretary.

12 (2) RENEWAL.—At the end of a grant term, the
13 recipient of such grant may reapply for a grant
14 under this section.

15 (3) LIMITATIONS.—A grant recipient under this
16 section shall not have more than 1 grant under this
17 section at anytime.

18 (4) RETURN OF UNSPENT GRANT FUNDS.—Not
19 later than 6 months after the date on which a grant
20 term ends, a recipient of a grant under this section
21 shall return any unspent grant funds to the Sec-
22 retary.

23 (g) REPORT.—Not later than 9 months after receiv-
24 ing a grant under this section, a grant recipient shall issue
25 a report to the Secretary describing the implementation

1 of the Seal of Biliteracy program for which the State re-
2 ceived such grant.

3 (h) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

4 (1) ESEA DEFINITIONS.—The terms “sec-
5 ondary school”, “Secretary”, and “State” have the
6 meanings given those terms in section 8101 of the
7 Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
8 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

9 (2) SECOND LANGUAGE.—The term “second
10 language” means any language other than English,
11 including Braille and American Sign Language.

12 (3) SEAL OF BILITERACY PROGRAM.—The term
13 “Seal of Biliteracy program” means any program es-
14 tablished or improved, and carried out with funds
15 received under this section.

16 (i) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
17 authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary
18 \$10,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2020 through 2024
19 to carry out this section.

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