

CHAPTER 303

AN ACT establishing the State Seal of Biliteracy and supplementing chapter 7C of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

C.18A:7C-13 Findings, declarations relative to the State Seal of Biliteracy.

1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

a. It is the intent of the Legislature to encourage excellence for all students, and the Legislature wishes to publicly recognize students for exemplary achievements in academic studies;

b. The study of foreign languages in elementary and secondary schools should be encouraged because it contributes to a student's cognitive development and to the national economy and security;

c. Proficiency in multiple languages is critical in enabling New Jersey to participate more effectively in the current global political, social, and economic context, and in expanding trade with other countries;

d. The demand for employees to be fluent in more than one language is increasing in New Jersey and throughout the world;

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

f. It is the intent of the Legislature to promote linguistic proficiency and cultural literacy in one or more foreign languages in addition to English and to provide recognition of the attainment of those needed and important skills through the establishment of the State Seal of Biliteracy. The State Seal of Biliteracy would be affixed on the high school transcripts of graduating students attaining proficiency in one or more foreign languages in addition to English.

C.18A:7C-14 Purposes of the State Seal of Biliteracy.

2. The State Seal of Biliteracy is established to recognize high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in one or more foreign languages in addition to English. The State Seal of Biliteracy shall be awarded by the local board of education to graduating high school seniors who meet the criteria established by the State Board of Education pursuant to subsection a. of section 3 of this act. School district participation in this program is voluntary.

The purposes of the State Seal of Biliteracy are as follows:

a. To encourage students to study languages;

b. To certify attainment of biliteracy;

c. To provide employers with a method of identifying people with language and biliteracy skills;

d. To provide universities with a method to recognize and award academic credit to applicants seeking admission;

e. To prepare students with 21st century skills;

f. To recognize and promote foreign language instruction in public schools; and

g. To strengthen intergroup relationships, affirm the value of diversity, and honor the multiple cultures and languages of a community.

C.18A:7C-15 Rules.

3. a. The State Board of Education shall promulgate rules pursuant to the “Administrative Procedure Act,” P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), establishing criteria for the award of a State Seal of Biliteracy. The criteria shall require a student to demonstrate proficiency in English by meeting State high school graduation requirements in English, including through State assessments and credits, and proficiency in one or more foreign languages other than English. The criteria shall permit a student to demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language other than English through multiple methods, including nationally or internationally recognized language proficiency tests.

For the purposes of this section, a foreign language other than English shall also include American Sign Language, Latin, and Native American languages.

b. The Commissioner of Education shall prepare and deliver to participating school districts a certificate to be awarded to the student and an appropriate insignia to be affixed to the transcript of the student indicating that the student has been awarded the State Seal of Biliteracy. The commissioner shall also provide any information the commissioner deems necessary for a school district to successfully participate in the program.

c. A school district that participates in the program under this section shall maintain appropriate records in order to identify students who have earned the State Seal of Biliteracy, and shall award the certificate and affix the appropriate insignia to a qualifying student’s transcript.

d. A school district that participates in the program may pay the costs of the program or may charge a fee to students who participate to cover the costs.

C.18A:7C-16 Report to Governor, Legislature.

4. The commissioner shall submit a report to the Governor, and the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), by September 1 of each school year that includes the number of students awarded the State Seal of Biliteracy in the previous school year, the languages in which those students attained proficiency, and the methods used by students to demonstrate proficiency for the State Seal of Biliteracy.

5. This act shall take effect immediately and shall first apply to the 2016-2017 school year.

Approved January 19, 2016.