

World Languages FAQ

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1. What is the role of the State Board of Education (SBE) in world languages?

[RCW 28A.230.090](#) authorizes SBE to establish state graduation requirements. SBE has established credit requirements, a Culminating Project, and a High School and Beyond Plan ([WAC 180-51-061](#), [WAC 180-51-066](#), and [WAC 180-51-067](#)).

While world languages is not currently a high school graduation requirement, SBE has included 2 credits of world languages in the career- and college-ready graduation requirements. When these new rules are adopted, all students will earn 2 world language credits, unless they substitute other courses that would better help them achieve their post high school goals, as stated in their high school and beyond plan. SBE will move forward on the career- and college-ready graduation requirements when funding is available.

Local districts and tribal schools may add other requirements, including a world language requirement.

2. Do colleges and universities require students to have a background in world languages?

Admission requirements at all Washington public, four-year colleges and universities, and many private four-year institutions, specify a minimum of 2 world language credits in the same language.

Specifically, the [minimum college admission standards](#) of the Higher Education Coordinating Board state that:

2 credits must be earned in the same World Language, Native American language, or American Sign Language. Schools may award credit based on a district approved competency assessment consistent with the State Board of Education policy and American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines.

Note: *A World Language course taken in middle school may satisfy one credit of the requirement if the second year level course is completed in high school grades 9-12.*

3. What is the sample world languages competency/proficiency-based credit policy and procedure?

The sample world languages competency/proficiency-based credit policy was developed by a collaboration of SBE, the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). The Washington State School Directors' Association hosts an example policy on their website that is available to subscribers. You can also find the sample policy and procedure here ([policy](#) / [procedure](#)).

4. Why did SBE, WSSDA, and OSPI develop a sample competency/proficiency-based credit policy and procedure?

In order to encourage districts to explore competency-based credit, the three organizations combined their resources to create a rigorous and fair process to assess world language knowledge and skills that students had acquired outside of the classroom. This practical guidance is intended to provide a road map for districts seeking to grant credit and an avenue for students to earn recognition, credit, and greater flexibility in their school schedules.

5. What state policy permits districts to award competency-based credit?

SBE's competency-based credit rule allows high school credit to be awarded upon:

(b) Satisfactory demonstration by a student of proficiency/competency, as defined by written district policy, of the state's essential academic learning requirements (learning standards).
(WAC [180-51-050](#))

SBE has endorsed competency-based approaches to education since the inception of education reform in Washington. Washington is one of 36 states with policies that permit students to earn competency-based credit.

6. Who else was involved in developing the sample competency/proficiency-based credit policy and procedure?

SBE used Gates funding to convene a World Languages Advisory Group of world languages high school and college teachers. The Advisory Group was asked to advise the SBE about: 1) the level of competency (i.e. language proficiency) students would need to attain in order to earn credit; 2) the manner of assessment that would be appropriate; and 3) the areas (e.g., speaking, reading, writing, and/or listening) in which competency might be expected. The Advisory Group met three times in 2009.

The SBE also conducted a small assessment study to compare the proficiency of high school students with two years of language study to that of college students with two academic quarters

of college study. Washington's data was then compared to national data. The study was not intended to be representative of all students but rather to give the Advisory Group data that could serve as a catalyst for discussion. Despite these limitations, the study found similarities between Washington and national data. For instance, writing scores were generally higher than speaking scores, and speaking scores were higher than reading scores. The Advisory Group used the data, as well as a review of selected other states' policies (Connecticut, New Jersey, and Utah) to make recommendations about the level of proficiency needed to award credit.

In July 2010, SBE passed a resolution encouraging districts to implement the policy and practices necessary to ensure students have the opportunity to demonstrate world language proficiency.

7. Does a competency/proficiency-based credit policy allow a student who speaks a language fluently to automatically be awarded credits?

Although these decisions are ultimately up to the district, the sample policy and procedure ([policy](#) / [procedure](#)) recommend that students demonstrate proficiency across a variety of language skills, including speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Therefore, it will be important for students who speak a language fluently to also make the effort to learn to read and write in the language in order to earn world language credits.

8. How can students demonstrate their proficiency?

The sample procedure ([policy](#) / [procedure](#)) recommends that districts identify nationally available proficiency assessments to use as the basis for awarding credit for proficiency. This is the most cost-effective, fair, and consistent way to make decisions about proficiency. In general, the assessments should be aligned to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency [Guidelines](#). ACTFL uses a proficiency scale from Novice (low, mid, high) to Intermediate (low, mid, high) to Advanced (low, mid, high) and Superior. Most K-12 language learners perform at the Novice or possibly Intermediate level, but students who are native or heritage speakers or have attended K-12 immersion programs may reach the Advanced level in some skills.

The Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP), developed at the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon and offered to schools and districts through [Avant Assessment](#), is an example of a nationally available standards-based assessment. STAMP currently covers seven languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish. For other languages, there are other nationally available assessments, such as the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) and Writing Proficiency Test (WPT) offered through [Language Testing International](#).

9. What about languages that don't currently have a standardized assessment developed?

Districts may want to include the option of developing a Collection of Evidence aligned to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for languages that do not currently have any other nationally available proficiency-based assessment. This Collection of Evidence model can be developed jointly with the assistance of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction World Languages Program and the involvement of local language communities. OSPI is working on a project to make [LinguaFolio Online](#), an online tool for student self-assessment and posting of evidence, available to language learners throughout the state. In addition, OSPI can support districts to offer a Proctored Writing Test and Proctored Oral Language Test, with external evaluation, as final evidence of satisfying the proficiency levels required for earning competency-based credits.

10. Does earning credits by demonstrating proficiency suggest that the student knows less (or more) than students who attended a regular in-school language program?

The sample world language policy and procedure recommend a standard for awarding credits for world languages proficiency after examining actual proficiency data collected at the national level and in Washington State. The goal is to set the standard at a high enough level without being unrealistic. Generally, students who earn credit for proficiency would be demonstrating a performance level similar to the top 15%-45% of the students in a traditional high school world language class, depending on the language, level, and quality of teaching. (For example, after two years of high school language study, students of Spanish are more likely to reach higher proficiency levels than students of Japanese or Chinese, which are more difficult for native English speakers to learn.) It is quite possible that a student earning credit for proficiency would have a higher level of proficiency than some (or many) of the students who earn credits based on seat-time in a traditional language class.

11. What will be the impact on language classes once this process is implemented?

There is no immediate impact to current language classes in the schools because the policy applies to students who have generally acquired or learned a language outside of school. For schools with a large number of heritage speakers (such as students who speak a language other than English with their families), having this option may increase their motivation to develop the ability to read and write in that language. Currently, many of those students are placed in first or second-year language classes although they are totally fluent in the spoken language. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction World Languages Program is developing resources that will help such students develop reading and writing skills to complement their speaking skills and to gain recognition of their skills by earning world language credits.

12. How will competency-based credits impact students' applications to college?

SBE and the Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) discussed the practical implications of competency-based credit. As a result, the HECB revised its [minimum admission standards policy](#) in 2011 to state:

Students may meet the World Language requirement through passage of a district approved competency assessment consistent with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines in order to ensure consistency across languages. The State Board of Education provides a sample policy for districts and recommended assessment tools: (<http://www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/FAQ%20World%20Language%20Proficiency.pdf>). Assessment procedures for other subject areas will be established in the future.

Highly competitive colleges and universities like to see three-four years of world language study (including Advanced Placement) at the high school level. Since competency-based credits will appear as a grade of "Pass" on the high school transcript (and not be factored into the student's overall Grade Point Average), that may seem to be a disadvantage over earning seat-time credits. The hope is that many students who would qualify for credit for competency/proficiency would be seeking to do so early (e.g., end of 8th grade/9th grade). That would give them time for additional study of the same or a different language in high school. In addition, over time we may expect that colleges will begin to shift their focus from seat-time credits to demonstrated proficiency, so students with evidence of language proficiency (through official assessment results) may find that to be an advantage.

13. In the sample procedure's definition of "World Languages" what does "formally studied" mean?

Generally, it is assumed that to develop literacy skills in a language requires some type of formal study. This may be, for example, attendance at a language class in a school or the community, study with parents or family members, online learning, or student self-study.

14. May districts collaborate to offer a testing site?

Yes. In fact, OSPI and SBE would encourage them to do so in order to reduce costs and increase opportunities for students. In addition, districts may want to participate in Washington [World Language Assessment Days](#) to offer students opportunities to take the nationally available language proficiency assessments and receive a certificate of recognition from OSPI and SBE.

Information about how districts may host a World Language Day may be found [here](#).

15. In what ways can the community support paying for assessments?

Districts are expected to set the fee for offering assessments for competency-based credit. The community could provide financial support, for example, to cover the costs for students to take the assessments in a given language (or in all languages). This would be an excellent way to support students who are not native speakers of English but have developed proficiency in their mother language or to encourage students who have shown initiative to learn a second or third language beyond English.

16. How many districts have adopted a competency/proficiency-based credit policy and procedure?

As of October, 2012, twenty-one districts have adopted a policy for awarding competency-based credit in world language.

17. How will competency/proficiency-based credit be noted on the standardized transcript?

As of school year 2012-2013, there is a new field for Competency-Based Credits on transcripts (see OSPI [Bulletin 013-12](#) for details). You would code "N" when using National assessments like STAMP, ACTFL OPI, OPIc, and WPT and LinguaFolio Online Collection of Evidence, or SLPI for ASL. Use "L" for a local assessment (for example, with a local teacher). For the latest updates on how districts are doing Competency-Based Credits, see this [link](#).

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