

***The 2021 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages:
How is SPS Preparing?***

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Summary:

When curriculum expectations shift, instructional practices change, too. The implementation of the new [Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages](#) is an exciting opportunity for students, as it aligns with American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) standards and allows students to be assessed on how they use the language, as opposed to solely focusing on what they know about the language. The new Framework was much-needed; the preceding document was written in 1999. More to the point, the updated standards represent the combined effort of educators and leaders from around the Commonwealth and a collective agreement on the importance of combining proficiency-focused verbiage with topics that are at the forefront of learning today, namely: Social Emotional Learning and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. In addition, the 2021 Framework addresses Shrewsbury Public Schools' strategic priorities of *Learning Environments Where Everyone's Success Matters*; *Enhanced Well-being of All*; and *Connected Learning for a Complex World*. The adoption of this Framework is currently underway. Adjusting instructional practices, however, will take many years and additional resources to complete.

The Vision Statement:

The 2021 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages states “All Massachusetts students should acquire a high level of linguistic and cultural proficiency in at least one world language. Proficiency in one or more world languages will empower students to

use languages other than English to tell their own stories, understand the stories of others, and engage with their communities” (6). This vision embodies our district’s core values of Commitment to High Standards & Expectations and Equity. Moreover, the objective, that ALL students acquire a high level of linguistic and cultural proficiency in at least one world language, firmly establishes World Languages as a core subject in which students at all levels of proficiency will use the target language to:

- communicate with speakers/signers of the target language, especially those in their schools and communities;
- explore and celebrate the products, practices, and perspectives of multiple cultures;
- compare their own languages and cultures with those of the target communities;
- expand their academic knowledge of other disciplines;
- serve and lead in their academic, local, and global communities;
- become lifelong beneficiaries of the opportunities that proficiency in multiple languages can offer them; and
- become agents of change that promote equity, global awareness, and multicultural understanding.

Guiding Principles for Effective World Language Programs:

The 2021 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages articulates the skills students need to learn in world language programs. Just as important, the document defines the components of an effective World Language program. Specifically, effective language programs should be designed to:

- include and benefit all students;

- teach cultural competency;
- produce high levels of linguistic and cultural competency;
- make meaningful, authentic, and real-life interactions using the target language;
- measure linguistic proficiency;
- encourage risk-taking and adopting a growth mindset;
- include relevant, cross-disciplinary content;
- make rigorous content accessible and appropriate for all through differentiation;
- connect students to peers in classroom, community, and speakers/signers throughout the world; and
- promote social and emotional growth.

The purpose of these principles is to “guide the design and implementation of world language programs in schools” (11). Although the Framework does not provide districts with a universal curriculum for languages, these principles should be considered when writing curriculum.

Organization of the Standards:

The 2021 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages is organized by target proficiency levels. These levels provide educators with benchmarks for identifying what skills students need to master at their level of proficiency. The three domains for each level are communication, linguistic cultures, and lifelong learning (15). Each domain lists the standards for practices at each proficiency level. It is important to note that the lifelong learning domain includes practices on social-emotional learning, student well-being and social justice. While adopting the new framework, it will be important for districts to provide learning experiences

and opportunities that address those practices. In contrast to the previous standards, the current standards define the various modes of communication that serve as the basis for learning experiences: interpretive, interpersonal, presentational, and intercultural communication. By nature, standards measuring linguistic proficiency are more complex. Therefore, those areas are further divided into five linguistic components for clarification.

Quick Reference Guides:

In order to facilitate and support the new framework, the creators along with the World Languages Leadership Network have provided quick [reference guides](#). These guides, which are found on the World Languages section of DESE's webpage, address specific key supports and make recommendations for implementing the framework. Of particular note are recommendations pertaining to assessment, classical languages, students with disabilities, social-emotional learning, and heritage learners. At Shrewsbury High School, we are excited about the prospect of recognizing language proficiency beyond existing World Language courses by implementing the Seal of Biliteracy program.

The Massachusetts Seal of Biliteracy:

The Seal of Biliteracy is a key element of the Look Act, which Governor Baker enacted on November 22, 2017 (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020). Its implementation in the Commonwealth aims to:

- encourage students to study and master languages;
- certify attainment of biliteracy skills;
- recognize the value of language diversity;

- provide employers with a method of identifying people with language and biliteracy skills;
- provide universities with a method to recognize and give credit to applicants for the attainment of high-level skills in languages;
- prepare students with skills that will benefit them in the labor market and the global society; and
- strengthen intergroup communication and honor the multiple cultures and languages in a community.

For students to earn the Seal, they must meet all graduation requirements, demonstrate high levels of proficiency in English, and demonstrate high levels of proficiency in a language other than English. Students may indicate a status of “language-confirmed candidates” for the Seal of Biliteracy if they have met the English and the language other than English (LOTE) requirements, pending the completion of all graduation requirements. Students do not need to wait until their senior year to test in the LOTE. The English proficiency levels are determined by the grade 10 ELA MCAS scores. The minimum qualifying score for the Seal of Biliteracy is 472 (MCAS NextGen); for the Seal with Distinction, the minimum score is 507 (MCAS NextGen). Students that score between 455-471 on the MCAS, may still qualify if they fulfill the requirements of an Educational Proficiency Plan and attain a minimum score (472) on an MCAS retake, or for ELLs, take the ACCESS exam and score 4.2 (overall) and 3.9 (composite literacy).

In addition to the high level of Proficiency in English, students must meet high standards in a LOTE. Students must attain the minimum level of Intermediate-High (or equivalent) on all relevant skills in the LOTE on an approved test or portfolio to earn the Seal of Biliteracy. To

earn the Seal with Distinction, students must score Advanced-Low (or equivalent) on all relevant skills in the LOTE on an approved test or portfolio. The relevant skills may vary according to whether the language is spoken or not, has a written representation, and/or is an ancient/classical language.

In the spirit of the new framework's focus on inclusion, participation should include all students, regardless of matriculation in a district's world language program. To promote and foster equity and an appreciation of all languages, students whose home language is a LOTE are highly encouraged to participate. The district must communicate to families a notice of participation in a language that they understand. The district must provide the testing free of charge to students with free/reduced lunch and may use Title I or IV Part A funds to cover the administration of the Seal.

The type of assessments of LOTE depends on the availability of formal examinations in the particular language. If a nationally accredited examination is not available in the language for which the student is to be assessed, the district's Seal of Biliteracy coordinator must contact DESE to arrange for alternative testing. After assessing students, districts must record their results, award the Seal, and provide the data on their SIMS report in July. The Seal (with and without Distinction) must be digitally affixed to the student diploma as well as official school transcripts for those who qualify.

The Seal of Biliteracy is an exciting initiative for world language departments across the Commonwealth, as it finally provides standardized data to evaluate programs and students. With this data, districts can truly measure student achievement in relation to the new state framework. In addition to world language students, this initiative is of equal importance to our heritage learners and speakers of languages other than English, as some state universities and community

colleges are offering college credit for students who earn the Seal, as is done with Advanced Placement scores. In this way, English language learners can be awarded credit for their native language skills rather than being required to learn a language in addition to English. The Massachusetts Seal of Biliteracy creates more equitable schools by “recognizing all students’ linguistic assets regardless of the language that students speak/sign” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020).

How is the district preparing educators and students for the new standards?

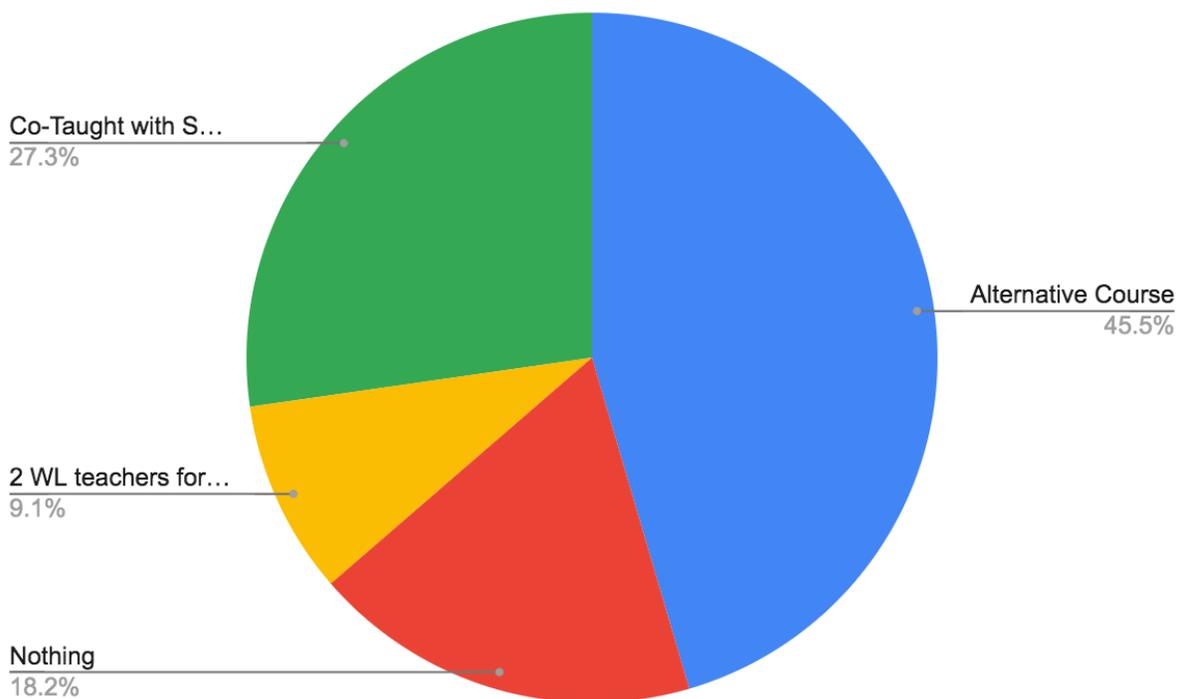
Implementing significant change requires a plan of action. In this first year, we are taking several significant steps. The section below details actions taken thus far as well as what we’ve learned as a result.

Department and Modern Language Courses Renamed:

Last year, Principal Todd Bazydlo proposed his annual Program of Studies review to the School Committee for approval and major changes to World Language courses were accepted. The department’s name changed to align with the new Framework, from *Foreign* to *World* Languages. Additionally, course names were changed to reflect ACTFL proficiency targets of Intro/Novice and Intermediate. The more popular novice courses (French and Spanish) were split into two years to provide similar pacing offered at the middle level. The change was made in order to be more equitable in our novice courses across the district. In consultation with Worcester State University, the Introduction to Linguistics course will count as one year of a world language due to the fact that the course is offered through the SHS Department of World

Languages. This is important for students on individual education plans (IEPs) who may struggle with spoken language. The creation of scaffolded novice courses are in line with data collected from other districts in Eastern Massachusetts (Almeida 3).

Supports Available to Special Education Students in World Languages in Eastern Massachusetts School Districts:



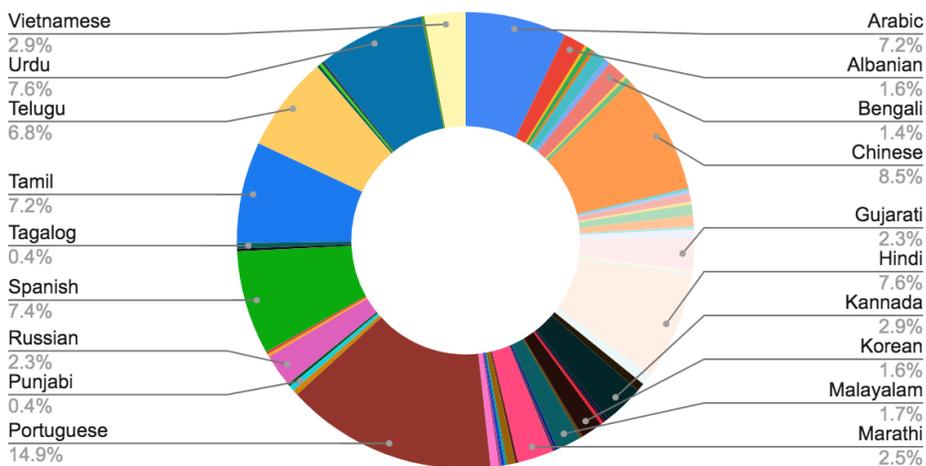
2022 Seal of Biliteracy Implementation:

As mentioned previously, SHS is preparing for the implementation of the Massachusetts Seal of Biliteracy. All seniors who are currently enrolled in a Level 5 or AP SHS World Language course will take the LOTE exam as part of their coursework. Our students will be tested using the AAPL (ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages) in modern language, and the ALIRA (ACTFL Latin Interpretive Reading Assessment) for Latin

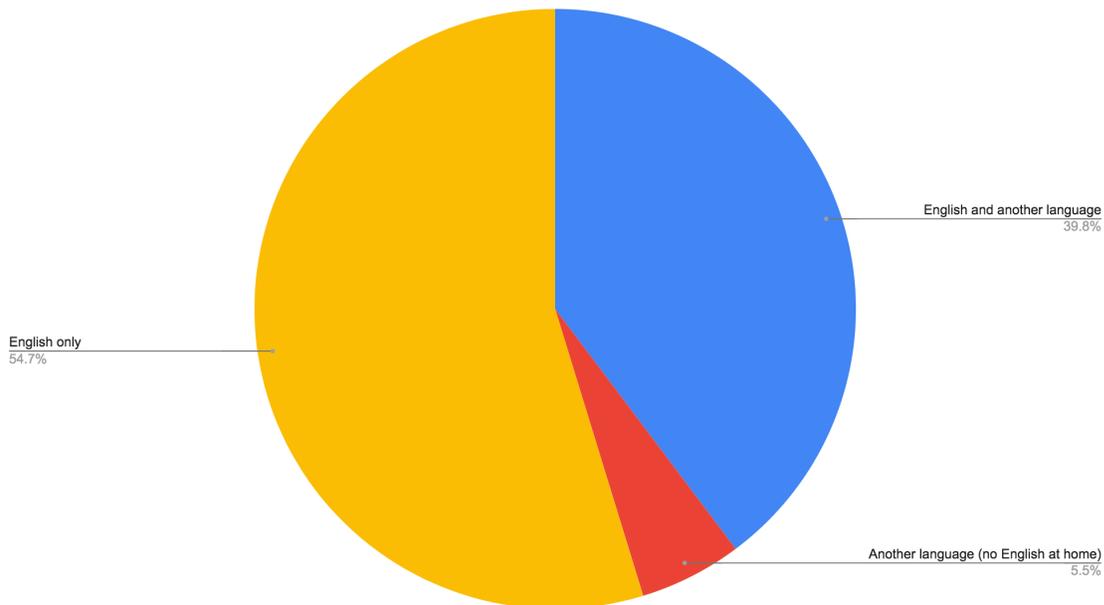
courses. It is important to reiterate that the 2021 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages is based on the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards. The terminologies used to qualify for the Seal (i.e. intermediate-high or advanced low) are based on the prescribed ACTFL proficiency levels which are used to measure students' progress in a world language. Additionally, all junior World Language students will take those exams in place of a traditional final exam. Many districts have incorporated them as part of their common assessments.

In preparation for testing students who are not currently matriculated in a SHS World Language class, a recent survey was conducted with the assistance of the SHS English and ELE classes to inventory students coming from homes where a language other than English is spoken. Of the 1,325 students surveyed, 45% identified as being from homes where a LOTE is spoken. Roughly 5% of those students come from homes where English is completely unspoken. Additionally, the survey identified twenty LOTE spoken in our community, with Portuguese accounting for the majority.

Count of What language do you speak at home that is not English?



Home Language



Almeida, K. (2021). [Home Language Survey Unpublished]. Shrewsbury Public Schools

Currently the AAPL exam is only available in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, and Thai. This means that if a student from a home where a different language is spoken wishes to participate in the Seal, the district will need to secure another approved test for that student.

In late November or early December of 2021, a letter will be sent to the families of seniors informing them of the district's participation in the Seal of Biliteracy. This letter will be sent in a language that the families can understand (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020). To that end, the Information Technology department has pulled a report on the current senior class whose families require written translation. Portuguese, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Arabic were identified. Translated versions of the [district's notice of participation](#) have been secured and will be sent to families in both principal and teacher

communications. Embedded in those letters is a registration form for students who wish to participate by assessing their home language. Once this data is collected, the languages requiring an alternative test will be identified. Finally, further consultation with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and other districts implementing the Seal will be necessary.

For languages available on the AAPL exam, the SHS leadership team is currently in the planning phase for administering the exam in a fair and equitable manner. Students participating in the Seal as world language students and those participating in the Seal based on their home language should have equal access to testing. As such, a variety of factors need to be considered before administering the AAPL including time on learning, space and scheduling constraints, staffing, special needs and accommodations, and transportation. Although the number of students participating in the Seal will not be as large as that of the MCAS, the logistical planning and training of proctors must take place. The Director of World Languages will meet with a representative of Language Testing International to obtain answers to frequently asked questions and will report back to the Shrewsbury High School administrative team to coordinate testing.

Heritage Language Courses:

The new Heritage Language Learning courses are another way that SPS is carrying out the vision of the new 2021 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Language. By recognizing the different needs of heritage learners and creating courses that address those needs while exploring their cultures, Shrewsbury is committed to ensuring that all students “acquire a high level of linguistic and cultural proficiency in at least one world language” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, p. 6). Curriculum work for our Portuguese

and Spanish level one course was completed in July of 2021. Thematic-based units were created by identifying relevant themes from the Advanced Placement Program and combining those with the facets of personal and cultural identities. These courses were the first to be written following the new Framework. At the end of the 2021-22 school year, these courses will be reviewed and any changes will be recommended based on student and teacher feedback. Additionally, a Level 2 course will be recommended to ensure continued growth and high levels of proficiency in our heritage languages.

Higher Enrollment of Students with Disabilities

The 2021 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Language’s vision statement states every student should acquire high levels of proficiency in another language. Learning a language is challenging work, so implementing a variety of supports for all students, especially at the novice level, is fundamental for student success. While recognizing that world language is not a graduation requirement, many students with disabilities are choosing a world language course as part of their Shrewsbury High School trajectory. Sound pedagogy and differentiation are essential components for learning another language. The new Framework’s [Quick Reference Guide](#) on Students with Disabilities highlights pragmatic strategies that build effective learning environments, most of which are currently in place in our novice level courses. Additionally, a [recent survey](#) shows that Shrewsbury’s current practices in differentiated novice level courses and alternative courses for students with individualized education plans align with what is happening in other districts (Almeida 3). More than 45% of participants in the survey indicated they offer courses similar to Shrewsbury at the high school level. At SHS, splitting level one courses in French and Spanish into two years was a result of the 2020 Program of Study revision.

Allowing students more time to develop novice-level language skills will lead to better preparation in the intermediate courses. In addition, the creation of our Linguistics courses will allow students to meet the world language requirement for state university acceptance since this course is housed in the SHS World Language Department.

Professional Development:

Today's world language classroom is one where learning experiences involve applying language to real-world situations. This shift from what students know about language to what they can do with the language has transformed classrooms from passive to active learning communities. Students engage with content using language in the three principal modes of communication: interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive. Summative assessment is done in the three modes via the Integrated/Unit Performance Assessment (IPA/UPA). Teachers use common rubrics to assess and give meaningful feedback for students to "level up" their performance. Students are assessed on whether or not they are meeting the standard (target proficiency level). Chapter tests where students are assessed on language components in isolation are no longer valid assessments in the proficiency-based classroom. Courses are created through thematic-based units involving backward design.

Recognizing that this is a substantial shift from more traditional methods, SPS educators have participated in a variety of professional development opportunities. Last year educators in grades 7-12 began with proficiency-based professional development offered by Joshua Cabral from World Language Classroom. Throughout the year, educators worked on creating department rubrics for interpersonal and presentational communication to be implemented this school year in preparation for the Framework. The director also offered a workshop on the shift

in assessments in the proficiency-based classroom. During Summer Learning 2021, some educators took a course on creating thematic-based units with Nicole Haghdoost, an educator at Wayland High School and a leader in the field. This year's first department professional development day (October 2021) was spent with world language expert Leslie Grahn, who provided educators with a recap of ACTFL proficiency levels, best practices, and assessing in the modes. In November, Idioma Consulting will facilitate a full day of learning for SHS teachers on the 2021 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Language. With a focus on proficiency, educators will review the standards as they learn ways to apply them to their practice (lesson planning and assessing).

Curriculum Work

Curriculum work will begin in grades 7-12 in order to adopt the new Framework. Some educators at SPS have been practicing proficiency-based approaches for years while others are at earlier stages of learning. Recognizing that some may need additional opportunities for learning as well as the effects that the pandemic has had on all stakeholders, the SPS World Language staff will embrace a slow and steady process of curriculum work. Teachers recognize that our current curriculum is outdated and has produced good results for some but not all students. The approach to curriculum revision for modern languages will be designing thematic-based units from a variety of sources including, but not limited, to the current program, AP themes, and themes from the AAPL exam for the Seal of Biliteracy, and through the Adiós program (online proficiency-based curriculum). In order to design curriculum mapping, the revision will begin at the novice level (grade 7) and eventually end at the intermediate-high level (grade 12). Units will be organized by using ACTFL can-do statements and the appropriate Framework standards

will be included. By nature, the process will be lengthy as educators will want to plan each level first before implementing. Other districts were consulted that have adopted proficiency-based curricula. Some of these districts (eg. Wayland) started writing a curriculum based on ACTFL World-Readiness Standards (new Massachusetts Framework) several years ago and are still in the process of doing so.

There is still much debate about how classical languages should be taught. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Quick Reference Guide for Classical Languages recognizes the different approaches to classical languages (2021). Some educators feel strongly that students should be able to speak a classical language as part of their studies, while others focus on providing literacy skills to their students. The Quick Reference Guide states that educators should “maintain a focus on students’ reading skills throughout instruction and assessment” (2). Considering that the focus of the ALIRA (Seal of Biliteracy Exam) is on interpretive communication, curriculum work in Latin will focus on developing interpretive skills by incorporating more opportunities for students to read and analyze authentic texts, and providing assessment opportunities in the interpretive mode. Latin teachers will be working on developing thematic-based units by adapting the current curriculum to include interpretive and intercultural communication. It is important to note that Latin has been the choice of many students due to its focus on reading, grammar, and translation. Opportunities for students to speak Latin are encouraged as part of learning experiences throughout the program.

Opportunities in Ensuring High Levels for Proficiency for All Students:

The following are recommendations for the implementation of the new Framework. They do not take into account the complexities surrounding the school budget process as well as

SPS's commitment to exercise fiscal discipline. They are merely suggestions for implementation of the Frameworks and an effort to promote and advance the study of world languages in the Shrewsbury Public Schools.

While some of the SPS World Language educators have been implementing proficiency-based practices for several years, others have recently begun learning about this approach. Continuous professional development is recommended for those educators to ensure SPS's commitment to the vision of the new Framework. In addition, site visits to other schools or teachers within the district are highly encouraged. Common planning time will be needed during curriculum development so that students' learning experiences are consistent. Department time will be devoted to common planning and curriculum development. Summer curriculum development may be needed to meet curriculum goals.

Due to previous budget cuts and their effects on curriculum, grade seven is now the stepping stone for the World Language program. Although it is widely recognized that learning a second language is best at the elementary level, it is recommended that the SPS program begin at grade seven in order to establish a stable curriculum map and to provide universal learning experiences for students. Learning at the novice level is best in small groups. Large class sizes in world language continue to be a concern, especially in Spanish classes at Oak Middle School where there are sections of Spanish with nearly 30 students. There are currently 7.5 full-time language education positions (FTEs) at OMS. It is humbly requested that the FTEs be increased at OMS by at least 1.5 in order to make class sizes more conducive to greater success at the novice level.

Throughout the years, some students have suggested adding an American Sign Language (ASL) program at the annual Town Meeting at SHS. The pandemic has brought ASL to the

forefront during live updates by government officials that include an interpreter. As ASL is a language included in the Seal of Biliteracy program, it may be worthwhile to survey students on their interest in this and other languages. In addition, the creation of a Portuguese program would allow students to gain literacy skills in this major language, preparing them for success in the future.

Conclusion:

It is a very exciting time to be a world language educator. The 2021 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Languages finally aligns with ACTFL World-Readiness Standards which have been in use by many educators in place of the 1999 Massachusetts Framework for Foreign Languages. The new framework marries the ACTFL/Proficiency Model with SEL and Social Justice, which are both at the forefront of education. The Seal of Biliteracy establishes equitable opportunities for students to demonstrate proficiency in languages other than English and provides district programs with much-needed data regarding their students. Practices that align with the new framework have been in place by some SPS World Language educators. It will be necessary to make these practices universal in the department through curriculum and professional development. The road to a full proficiency-based program that is aligned with the 2021 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for World Language will be long, but changes in assessment and practice will greatly support our students as well as the journey to high levels of proficiency for all.

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