

PRESS RELEASE

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Seal of Biliteracy Recognizes Value of Diversity in KCPS *Students can now earn recognition for expertise in English and any other world language*

Kansas City, November 30, 2018: Kansas City Public Schools is committed to being a nurturing, safe harbor with high-quality schools where the wide variety of student and family backgrounds and skills are celebrated as strengths. Now the school system has the seal to prove it.

On Nov. 1, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education informed KCPS administrators that the school system has met the criteria to award the state's Seal of Biliteracy to qualified students. This marked the culmination of about 18 months of diligent effort by KCPS staff, particularly those in the Office of Language Services, to gain the right to award the seal to deserving students.

"As the most diverse school system in the state, it only makes sense for KCPS to add the Missouri Seal of Biliteracy to the growing array of academic and extra-curricular programs, options and honors we offer our remarkable scholars," Superintendent Mark Bedell said. "The seal will have a tangible and positive impact on students, their families, our staff, our partners and our neighbors."

The Missouri Seal of Biliteracy is an award granted by a local system to recognize a student who has attained proficiency in English and one or more other world language(s) before high school graduation. The recognition of attaining biliteracy becomes a part of the high school transcript for these students and serves to certify attainment of biliteracy for the community, employers and universities.

Out of more than 500 school systems in the state, KCPS will now be one of only about 40 that are qualified to award their high school graduates the Missouri Seal of Biliteracy. KCPS is the largest and most diverse school system in the Kansas City, Mo. region to gain this privilege.

The Missouri Seal of Biliteracy aligns perfectly with the policies and strategic priorities set by the KCPS School Board and Dr. Bedell, including a commitment to equity across the system, nurturing a network of support for students and families, and creating more opportunities to prepare for college and career success.

"It's a chance for us to show how much we honor and celebrate the diversity and the language assets of the students in KCPS, the students that come from other countries and want to learn English, but also the students that are here that are native English speakers and value learning about another culture and learning another language," Director of Language Services Allyson Hile said. "They're going to exit and leave us proficient in two languages, and just have so many opportunities available to them."

KCPS counts about 4,600 students as English Language Learners and about 2,500 households where the primary language of the parents/guardians is something other than English. It is anticipated that approximately 300 current KCPS high school students will have an opportunity soon to qualify for the seal.

One of those students is Mercy Melly, who attends East High School, the largest and among the most diverse schools in KCPS. She's looking forward to gaining the Missouri Seal of Biliteracy as a way of opening the door to becoming a translator.

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“I like this program because it is an opportunity for new experiences,” Ms. Melly said. “Not everyone can express themselves when they first arrive to the United States, and if I can help people through translation, I would welcome the opportunity.”

KCPS recognizes that it is critical that all students, staff, family members, partners, employers, officials and neighbors understand that biliteracy and cultural competence are strengths that deserve to be celebrated and leveraged.

“Too often our ELLs are viewed as language deficient because they do not speak English with native proficiency when they first arrive to the United States,” said Doug Bartel, an ELL teacher at EHS. “The Seal of Biliteracy finally offers Kansas City Public Schools and the State of Missouri an excellent, formal way to honor and encourage our students’ multilingual talents.”

The Missouri Seal of Biliteracy is recognized and endorsed by a number of colleges, universities and businesses, including Missouri State University, Truman State University and Mastercard. Seal-holders will have opportunities to earn college credit and career development thanks to this recognition.

“The Seal of Biliteracy will open opportunities for all of our students to become more marketable in the workforce,” EHS Principal Luis Hinojosa said. “We can have native English speakers who have become proficient in their foreign language classes earn the Seal of Biliteracy as well. We are providing ALL of our students a chance to not only embrace their home language, but be proud that they are able to effectively communicate in an another language.”

Visit www.kcpublicschools.org/biliteracy to learn more about this new option for KCPS students.