

## Title: Credentialing Additional Language Proficiency across CTE Career Pathways with the Seal of Biliteracy

Author: Dina R. Yoshimi

Our nation's multilingual talent has long been one of our best-kept secrets, but it's one we can no longer afford to keep. With our 21<sup>st</sup> century penchant for stretching supply lines, educational opportunities, production processes, collaborative research endeavors, and leisure travel around the globe, the need for proficient multilingual skills in the workforce has never been greater. Addressing this need is not merely aspirational; it is essential. The competitiveness of American industry, the strength of our national security, the global engagement of our researchers and educators, and the equitable access to human services for limited English proficient populations all depend on our doing so.

The persistent and growing demand for multilingual proficiency in the workforce is the bellwether. Multilingual skills are valued by employers from “big box” home improvement stores to utility companies, from tax preparers to life insurance salespersons, from the courts and the schools to large multinational corporations in diverse industry sectors. A search for the demand for bilingual skills across CTE Career Pathways using the award-winning [Hawai'i Career Explorer tool](#), finds that these skills are in demand across all nine CTE Career Pathways in the state. Yet, the demand for these skills is not yet reflected programmatically in CTE: Students who have these skills may remain unaware of their value for their future employment and career development.

Credentialing a student's additional language skills increases their visibility and highlights their relevance to the student's career pathway. An example is instructive: “April” spoke Japanese as a home language and studied the language in high school to improve her reading and writing abilities. She was recognized at graduation with the Hawai'i State Seal of Biliteracy, which certifies a high level of proficiency in English and at least functional fluency in an additional language. (Fluency in the additional language is evaluated using a language proficiency assessment that is aligned with the nationally-recognized [ACTFL proficiency standards](#).) When a popular clothing retailer from Japan opened a store on O'ahu, “April” joined the line of eager applicants that stretched for blocks. She had no experience in retail, and she flubbed the group interview badly. On the way out of the interview, however, the interviewer mentioned her resume and asked her about the Seal of Biliteracy that she recently had earned. Despite two seemingly insurmountable strikes against her, “April” was hired because of her language proficiency. The credential made this asset visible to the employer; the employer, in turn, made the value of her skills visible to “April.”

Currently, forty states and the District of Columbia have a State [Seal of Biliteracy](#). For students in states that do not yet have a State Seal, there is the nationally-recognized [Global Seal of Biliteracy](#). On top of the evidence of strong demand for multilingual skills across industry sectors, employers, themselves, report that they take note of additional language proficiency in the hiring process (Damari et al. 2017; Gandara 2015). Additional research has found that, if a job applicant has a State Seal of Biliteracy, s/he has an advantage in the hiring process (Jansa & Brezicha 2017; Porras et al. 2014).

In Hawai'i, these findings were supported anecdotally within days of the Roadmap beginning its latest project: the credentialing of language skills among students in a Community Health Worker certification program with the Global Seal of Biliteracy. A representative from the partner

program reported that, despite the pilot nature of the project, two employers had already indicated interest in hiring program completers who earned the Seal. Credentialing of additional language proficiency across CTE Career Pathways can increase the visibility of these highly valued skills for students and employers alike.

A closing anecdote reveals just how significant the payback for increased awareness of language proficiency can be: A few years ago, a professor of Cell and Molecular Biology at my home institution with a deep interest in fruit fly DNA had an undergraduate student in his class who was determined to undertake a Capstone Research project. The student had been born and raised in Vietnam and was bilingual and biliterate. Recognizing her additional language proficiency, the professor agreed to mentor her ambitious project: to collect fruit fly samples in Vietnam to fill a longstanding gap in the international DNA database. [Uyen's story](#) is one that shows the enormous payoff that can result from combining language proficiency with scientific expertise. The data she collected as an undergraduate student was added to the GenBank database, a collection of publicly available DNA sequences maintained by the National Institute of Health. Her data also helped her mentor fill a gap in his research. Teachers, too, have the power to raise student awareness of their “hidden” language skills, and to guide them in deploying this strength to pursue their own 21<sup>st</sup> century global endeavors.