

Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages

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May-June 2022 Newsletter



Vestal High School's Story of Multilingual Success

On a brisk September morning at 7:30 AM, a few dozen students crowded into the Vestal High School Library to learn about the Seal of Biliteracy. After eight months, exams in 10 separate languages, numerous meetings with mentors, a lot of practice, some nerves, and 30 world language presentations, 26 students earned the Seal in English and a total of 12 world languages (Spanish, French, German, Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, Romanian, Ukrainian, Russian, Turkish, Gujarati, and Mandarin) — an astounding accomplishment! One student, Lejla Mujakovic, earned her Seal in four separate languages in addition to English!

Now you might ask, how did one student earn her Seal in English and four world languages? Firstly, Vestal has strong world language programs in Spanish, French, and German, offering level 5 IB courses in all three languages. The district embeds the culminating Seal presentation into these courses so that all students are prepared for the Seal, if they choose to pursue it. Additionally, school staff personally invite and recruit students who come from diverse households, adding more home languages to the program. As a district, they equally validate and value the contributions that diverse home languages and cultures bring into the school. The Seal provides an opportunity for Vestal to formally recognize the home environment. In Lejla's case, she attributes her success to a combination of her family heritage, which included exposure to Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, but she also challenged herself to learn German in school. While New York State has about 200 students earn the Seal of Biliteracy in two world languages in addition to English, and a handful who have earned it in three world languages, Lejla is the very first student in our state to earn the Seal in four world languages in addition to English. She truly exemplifies the values of cultural and linguistic diversity that the district holds dear.

Three staff members that are intimately involved in Vestal's Seal program, Gianni Cordisco, Ingrid Constable-Clarke, and Patrick Clarke, shared with our office how the International Baccalaureate Program and the skills it instills in students has been a major factor in the success of their Seal program. "The International Baccalaureate Learner Profile aims to develop internationally minded students who strive to be inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective. We believe this profile serves as a foundation that our students, teachers, and families stand behind. Without having students who are comfortable taking risks and venturing into a variety of cultures and languages, this program would not exist. Without our teachers serving as mentors and continually guiding our students through this process, our program would have failed. Without our families, who support our philosophy and our students in their endeavors, these success stories would not be possible." Truly, Vestal prides itself on not only what they can offer to their students as educators, but what their students and families can offer the district.

For more information on how to start a New York State Seal of Biliteracy program at your school, please visit our [website](#) or contact us at nysb@nysed.gov.



Lejla Mujakovic, New York State's first Seal of Biliteracy graduate in English and four world languages, is a member of the graduating class of 2022 from Vestal High School.

