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Integration of AAPPL in Language Education at Northmont High School

Case Study

Created by Language Testing International and Christopher Lemon,
Northmont High School World Languages Department Chair

Summary

With the revamp of the Ohio Department of Education standards in 2012, aligning with the [ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines](#), the Northmont High School educators began to transition from a grammar-first instructional approach to a proficiency-based one. In 2019, Northmont became an early adopter of the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy, a prestigious award for high school students who demonstrate a high level of proficiency in at least two languages. The educators at Northmont envisioned the Seal as a way to honor their highest performing world language students, as well as to honor and celebrate

the linguistic diversity in their school among their English Language Learners. After considering several assessment options for the Seal, they selected the [ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages \(AAPPL\)](#).

Challenge: A need for a valid, reliable, and proficiency-based language assessment for the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy.

Solution: The ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL).

Outcomes:

- Enhanced language proficiency: The AAPPL facilitated a transition towards proficiency-based language education, resulting in improved performance and proficiency levels among students.
- Increased student engagement and confidence: Structured administration of the AAPPL

reduced student stress and anxiety, leading to heightened engagement and confidence.

- Alignment with pedagogical philosophies: The AAPPL seamlessly aligned with Northmont High School's teaching philosophies, emphasizing communication skills, helping prepare students for real-life communication scenarios and fostering a culture of language development and proficiency awareness.

Identifying the Need: Proficiency-Based Assessments for the Ohio Seal of Biliteracy

Northmont High School is a public high school in Clayton, Ohio. It serves about 1,700 students from the communities of northern Montgomery County. With Ohio's adoption of the state Seal of Biliteracy in 2018, the focus on language assessment at Northmont High School became paramount. Lacking an official assessment for students, the administrators and educators at Northmont began the search for the most suitable proficiency-based language assessment.



Solution: The ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL)

Several assessment options were considered during the search period, and the AAPPL emerged as the best solution to meet the needs of the educators at Northmont. It was adopted during the 2018-2019 academic year.

Educators at Northmont cited several reasons why they selected the AAPPL, including its alignment with existing teaching philosophies, cost-effectiveness,

and flexibility in administration. Unlike other assessments, the AAPPL seamlessly integrated into the curriculum, allowing any student to participate without scheduling conflicts or needing to take AP or IB classes. The phased administration of the test over multiple class days mitigated student stress and minimized schedule disruptions.

The AAPPL reinforces our switch to communication-based pedagogy and assessment. Our students were already learning to measure and reflect on their linguistic growth based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012, so it made sense to go with the official ACTFL assessment. We wanted to prepare our students for real-world language use, and the AAPPL most closely matched this need. The AAPPL is, of course, the only test that offers official ACTFL scores, which was also important to us.

*—Christopher Lemon,
World Language Department Chair*

Adoption and Expansion

Initially administered to 15 Spanish student volunteers, the AAPPL gradually became mandatory for fourth-year Spanish students and later extended to third-year students, including those in college credit plus programs. Expansion efforts also encompassed German language students and English Language Learners who tested in their heritage languages.

The AAPPL is not a timed test, so the test proctors at Northmont assign their own time limits for each component of the test. Presently, students are allotted about 40 minutes each for the Interpretive Listening and Interpretive Reading sections, and one hour for Presentational Writing. The Interpersonal Listening and Speaking section is self-contained with

time limits for each prompt, and typically lasts around 30 minutes. Each section of the test is completed on separate days, resulting in improved performance and reduced anxiety among students.

Over the years, the number of test-takers and Ohio Seal of Biliteracy earners has steadily increased, reflecting the program's success. The table below shows numerical growth year over year that Northmont has cultivated. The AAPPL has become the backbone of the upper-level courses at Northmont, with formative and summative implications, including a positive impact on the priority given to communication over isolated grammar throughout all levels.

Northmont High School AAPPL Data 2019-2023

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
#Spanish Testers	15	22	53	58	98
#German Testers	0	0	9	8	10
#Senior Testers	7	8	20	38	31
#Non-senior Testers	8	14	42	28	77
#Ohio Seal of Biliteracy Earners					
(Minimum of I-5 on 3 components and I-4 on one component)	2	2	8	11	24
Average Speaking (ILS) - Spanish	I-1 (5.4)	I-3 (7.5)	I-3 (7.2)	I-3 (7.4)	I-2 (6.4)
Average Writing (PW) - Spanish	I-3 (7.8)	I-3 (7.6)	I-3 (7.5)	I-3 (7.0)	I-3 (7.4)
Average Listening (IL) - Spanish	I-5 (9.4)	I-5 (9.2)	I-3 (7.4)	I-3 (7.4)	I-2 (6.2)
Average Reading (IR) - Spanish	I-3 (7.2)	I-3 (8.0)	I-3 (7.9)	I-4 (8.3)	I-4 (8.0)
Average Speaking (ILS) - German	N/A	N/A	N-3 (3.0)	N-3 (3.1)	N-2 (2.0)
Average Writing (PW) - German	N/A	N/A	N-4 (4.2)	I-1 (5.1)	I-1 (5.3)
Average Listening (IL) - German	N/A	N/A	I-1 (5.9)	I-2 (6.7)	I-1 (5.0)
Average Reading (IR) - German	N/A	N/A	I-2 (6.1)	I-3 (7.3)	I-2 (6.1)

It is noteworthy that despite the policy of not retesting seniors in sections previously passed as juniors, and despite the limited number of heritage learners, the average Spanish scores consistently surpass national averages for schools with traditional world language programs. The commendable performance in German scores is also highlighted, given the constraint of offering only three years of instruction, culminating in the school's first Seal of Biliteracy recipient in 2023. Christopher Lemon, the World Language Department Chair at Northmont High School said, **"We strongly believe that by aligning our instructional practices with the ACTFL principles reflected in the AAPPL, we are best preparing our students not only for the test, but more importantly for real-life communication."**



Impact and Results

The AAPPL test data from 2019 to 2023 showcased remarkable growth in both Spanish and German language ability among students. The integration of the AAPPL not only influenced instructional practices but also fostered a culture of self-reflection and proficiency awareness among staff and students. Feedback from staff and students highlighted the transformative impact of AAPPL on language learning and student confidence. Teachers observed elevated student motivation and confidence, attributing success to collaborative efforts and tailored instruction. Students echoed sentiments of increased confidence and clarity in language learning goals, emphasizing

the test's role in guiding their linguistic development and academic pursuits. "Numbers are great, but the real results that we have seen have been in the way that our staff and students view and talk about their own language growth and goals. While we had already begun to incorporate self-reflection and informal proficiency assessments into our coursework, the professional test results have greatly improved the structure of our courses and the accuracy with which we inform students about their progress," shared Christopher Lemon about the impact of the AAPPL on the Northmont teachers and students.

“For me, the biggest impact the AAPPL has is boosting my confidence in my abilities in Spanish. I hadn't gotten a proper language placement prior to the AAPPL, and taking the test and having that feedback allowed me to self-reflect and see where I could improve. It also lets me see how far I've come since I started! It's really important to have positive reinforcement and constructive criticism as you continue developing a language, and my first exposure to that was the AAPPL. I think it's great to start seeing that early on, especially if you plan to continue studying the language as I have.”

*—Jazlyn Simon,
Northmont student,
Class of 2020*

We have the best scores in all surrounding schools, and we see our students consistently being successful. Each Northmont teacher and student shares the achievable goal because we work ridiculously hard and start that training in Spanish 1. Students start hearing about it [Seal of Biliteracy] then. Thanks to this, along with our responsible and resilient mindset, students have established trust in us as teachers. Students have confidence they can get there, based on our past performance and deep care for who they are as student learners and leaders. The first goal is the test; the bigger picture goal is proficiency in Spanish to make them global competitors and contributors.

*—Sarah Gosser,
Northmont City Schools,
Spanish dept.,
Sinclair Adjunct Professor*

Conclusion

The AAPPL has become an integral component of language education at Northmont High School, driving instructional practices, promoting proficiency, and empowering students to excel in real-world language usage. Its success underscores the importance of aligning assessment tools with pedagogical philosophies to enhance student learning outcomes and foster proficiency. Through strategic integration and continuous evaluation, Northmont High School has set a precedent for effective language education practices.

Further Reading

For Christopher Lemon's articles about implementing the AAPPL, washback effect, and using data and reports to inform instruction, go to <https://www.languagetesting.com/blog/author/clemon/>.