
State Laws/Regulations

Referencing the Legitimacy of American Sign Language

LIST CURRENT AS OF 2/15/2016

The following list identifies the status of American Sign Language as a language in each state. In most cases, the description has been quoted from the legislation or developed from information provided by the state commission on deafness or a state-level office that serves deaf and hard of hearing people. Asterisks identify the 45 states with such legislation.

Alabama*: Yes. “The Legislature of Alabama recognizes American Sign Language as the official and native language of Deaf people in Alabama.” American Sign Language is taught in several colleges and academic credit is granted. American Sign Language is taught in high schools on a limited basis.

Alaska*: If a course in American Sign Language is offered, the course shall be given credit as a foreign language.

Arizona*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized as a language by state legislature. The University of Arizona accepts American Sign Language for foreign language credit. Other postsecondary programs and high schools also accept American Sign Language for foreign language credit.

Arkansas*: Yes. Act 328 of the Arkansas 89th General Assembly (2013) authorizes public high schools to offer American Sign Language (ASL) as a foreign language for credit. The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) has developed an ASL appendix to the Modern Languages I-IV curriculum framework; this appendix was adopted by the State Board of Education in May 2014. The ADE Licensure Unit has developed teacher competencies for ASL and is currently developing licensure requirements.
http://www.arkansased.org/public/userfiles/Learning_Services/Curriculum%20and%20Instruction/Frameworks/Foreign%20Lang/American_Sign_Language_I_IV_2014.pdf

California*: Yes. Effective July 1, 1988, high school students are required to complete a minimum number of courses in specified subjects in order to receive a high school diploma. Education Code (Section 51225.3) provides that for the purposes of satisfying this requirement, a course in American Sign Language shall be deemed a course in foreign language. <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ss/dh/positionstmnt.asp>

Colorado*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with distinct grammar, syntax and art form. ASL classes are offered at elementary, secondary and post-secondary level.

Connecticut*: Yes. American Sign Language is offered as a language arts course, provided such subject matter is taught by a qualified instructor under the supervision of a teacher who holds a certificate issued by the State Board of Education. House Bill No. 6499 Public Act No. 11-136, 2011

Delaware*: Yes. Recent legislation amended Delaware Code to allow American Sign Language to be recognized as and considered a World Language. The University of Delaware offers American Sign Language as a foreign language and grants academic credit. Delaware Technical and Community College offers certificate and diploma programs in ASL.
http://www.doe.k12.de.us/programs/ci/content_areas/world_languages.shtml

Florida*: Yes. Effective August 1, 1991, each student who is admitted to a state university must have completed two credits of sequential foreign language at the secondary level or the equivalent of such instruction at the post-secondary level. Students shall be exempt from the provisions of this subsection if they can demonstrate proficiency in American Sign Language equivalent to that of students who have completed two credits of such instruction in high school. For the purposes of this section, American Sign Language constitutes a foreign language. Florida high schools may offer American Sign Language as a for-credit elective or as a substitute for any already authorized foreign language requirement.

Georgia*: Yes. ASL is recognized in Georgia as a World Language for deaf students and other students and can be used to meet the requirement toward graduation. Performance Standards have been adopted as well. In addition, the Georgia Board of Regents recognizes ASL for purposes of enrollment.
<https://www.georgiastandards.org/Frameworks/GSO%20Frameworks%20Support%20Docs/AmerSignLang%20Introduction.pdf>

Hawaii: Yes, but not state law. American Sign Language 1 and 2 are included under World Languages in Hawaii D.O.E.'s Authorized Courses and Code Numbers Catalog for secondary schools. Colleges and universities also offer or accept transfer of ASL credits.

Idaho*: Yes. Senate concurrent resolution no. 102 - American Sign Language, coursework.
<http://legislature.idaho.gov/legislation/2007/scr102.html>. Legislature of the state of Idaho
<http://www.legislature.idaho.gov/legislation/2015/H0152.pdf>. Some secondary schools and colleges recognize American Sign Language as a foreign language and offer academic credit.

Illinois*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized as a foreign language for high school credit. This allows up to four years of class credits, and one year of credit for demonstrated proficiency.

Indiana*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized as a standard, independent language under Indiana code. Schools may offer classes in American Sign Language as a first or second language for hearing, deaf or hard of hearing students to fulfill world language diploma requirements. State educational institutions may offer classes in ASL as a foreign language or part of another discipline and award credit for the courses to satisfy a requirement for the study of a foreign language or another discipline. Indiana Standards for American Sign Language have been revised and will be implemented in the 2014- 2015 School Year.

<http://www.in.gov/legislative/ic/code/title21/ar41/ch8.html>

Iowa*: Yes. A law enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Iowa stipulates that instruction in American Sign Language shall be in addition to and not in lieu of, provision of instruction in other foreign languages. Foreign language means spoken and written languages other than the English language, and includes American Sign Language. This relates to the teaching of American Sign Language in accredited schools.

Kansas*: Yes. Recognized as a foreign language in Kansas according to state statute 72-1121, L1990 Ch. 253. P.2, July 1, 1990. The state legislature passed a bill stating that American Sign Language is recognized by the state of Kansas as a language. The state board of education shall provide for the teaching of American Sign Language in accredited schools and all students whether hearing or hearing impaired may be given instruction in American Sign Language. Any state educational institution may offer an elective course in American Sign Language. Students enrolled at any of the state educational institutions which offer a course in American Sign Language may enroll in such course and with the concurrence of the state educational institution may count credit received for the course toward satisfaction of foreign language requirement of the institution.

Kentucky*: Yes. If a course in American Sign Language is offered by a state university or community college, it shall be accepted as foreign language credit. Successful completion of any American Sign Language course in the common schools shall satisfy the foreign language entrance requirements for a state institution of higher education.

Louisiana*: Yes. Any public high school shall offer instruction in a course in American Sign Language as an elective course provided a sufficient number of students desire to enroll in such course. Any public high school offering a course in American Sign Language shall provide instruction to any pupil wishing to participate in such course. The State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education shall establish by rule criteria for each parish or city school board to determine whether a sufficient number of students desire a course in American Sign Language and shall develop appropriate procedures for submittal of such determinations by any parish or city school board wishing to offer such instruction. The board shall prescribe suitable teaching materials for the instruction and provide for teacher qualifications. American Sign Language shall mean a visual language which has emerged from the Deaf Culture and is composed of handshapes, movement, and body and facial expression, and possesses an identifiable syntax and grammar specific to visual languages which incorporates spatial relationships as a linguistic factor.

Maine*: Yes. American Sign Language is the official state language of the deaf community. Each school administrative unit may offer American Sign Language as a foreign Language and offer credit at the elementary and secondary levels.

<http://janus.state.me.us/legis/statutes/20-A/title20-Asec4726.html>

Maryland*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized as a language by the state. County boards of education in the State are authorized to give academic credit for the study of American Sign Language. University system of Maryland currently accepts American Sign Language as a foreign language. <http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/comarhtml/13a/13a.03.02.04.htm>

Massachusetts*: Yes. State law and Curriculum Framework for all public elementary and secondary schools state, American Sign Language shall be recognized as a standard, independent language with its own grammar, syntax, vocabulary, and cultural heritage. Courses in American Sign Language may be taught for the purpose of contributing to a greater understanding of the social and cultural dimensions of the language, and to encourage and enable increased interaction between hearing persons and deaf and hard of hearing persons in society. School committees may credit such courses toward satisfaction of foreign language requirements.

Michigan*: Yes. The board of a school district may grant high school credit in a foreign language to a pupil enrolled in high school who has satisfactorily completed a high school course offered in American Sign Language or who has attained proficiency in American Sign Language outside of a public or private high school curriculum. http://www.michigan.gov/.../mde/WL_Guidelines_FINAL_206823_7.pdf

Minnesota*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized as a foreign language in state legislature. ASL classes are offered at elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. ASL is also included in the bilingual seal legislation passed in 2014.

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=120B.022>

Mississippi: Yes, but not state law. American Sign Language as a foreign language has never been proposed to the state legislature. However, some post-secondary programs offer American Sign Language for credit and some public high schools also offer ASL as a credit course (1 Carnegie unit).

Missouri: Yes, but not as state law. The state department of elementary and secondary education recognizes American Sign Language as a language to meet foreign language requirements.

Montana*: Yes. A joint resolution of the Senate and the House of Representatives urging the Board of Education and the Board of Public Education to recognize American Sign Language as a separate and complete language and to authorize teaching ASL as part of the public school and university system curriculum passed all committees involved in hearings during January and February of 1995. The resolution was adopted February 1, 1995.

Nebraska*: Yes. Students may take American Sign Language at community colleges and post-secondary programs and receive credit.

Nevada*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized in the state legislature as a foreign language. American Sign Language is offered and accepted as a foreign language to fulfill high school and post-secondary language requirements.

New Hampshire: Yes, but not as state law. In September 2007, the Professional Standards Board adopted teacher certification language to implement the regulation that designates ASL as a World Language for High School requirement purposes. This went into effect July 1, 2008. ASL certification was fully implemented July 2012.

New Jersey*: Yes. The New Jersey State Assembly and Senate passed resolutions in 1995 recognizing American Sign Language and Deaf Culture, and urging the State's institutions of higher education and local school districts to award foreign language credit for the completion of American Sign Language course. Senate Resolution (SR-80) passed 12 December 1995. Assembly Resolution (AR-103) passed 2 May 1995. Updated in 2014. <http://www.state.nj.us/education/cccs/2014/wl/WL.pdf>

New Mexico*: Yes. American Sign Language as a foreign language has never been proposed to the state legislature but is recognized as a language in statutes related to the provision of interpreting services. When American Sign Language is offered at the university and postsecondary level, students receive academic credit.

New York*: Yes. Elementary and secondary schools offer instruction in American Sign Language for second language credit. Students will earn credits to meet second language requirements upon graduation and higher education institutions will be encouraged to establish teacher-training programs in American Sign Language. <http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/lote/lotestands/lotestand.html>

North Carolina*: Yes. In 2007, the General Assembly of North Carolina passed legislation (§ 115C- 81.3) recognizing ASL as a modern language that fulfills the UNC Minimum Admissions requirement for foreign language at the state's colleges and universities. Manually Coded English (MCE) systems, such as Signing Exact English and Seeing Essential English (SEE), do not meet the requirement. The North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) adopted ASL standards for Levels I and II, along with ASL teacher certification standards, in May 2007. Levels III and above are based on the Modern Languages standards. The new North Carolina World Language Essential Standards, which are being implemented beginning in 2012-2013, has proficiency- based standards for North Carolina, continued: eight levels of modern languages, and ASL-specific Assessment Examples (AEs) and other information will be made available. <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/worldlanguages/scos/>

North Dakota*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized as a foreign language in state legislature. ASL is only offered at the post-secondary level for foreign language credit.

Ohio*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized as a foreign language, and any public or chartered non-public school may offer a course in American Sign Language. A student who successfully completes a course in American Sign Language is entitled to receive credit for that course toward satisfaction of a foreign language requirement of the public or chartered nonpublic school where the course is offered.

Ohio, continued: American Sign Language is hereby recognized as a foreign language, and any state institution of higher education may offer a course in American Sign Language. An undergraduate student who successfully completes a course in American Sign Language is entitled to receive credit for that course toward satisfaction of an undergraduate foreign language requirement of the state institution of higher education where the course is offered. Currently, ASL is the sixth most subscribed world language in Ohio at the K-12 level.

Oklahoma*: Yes. American Sign Language is hereby recognized as a language and may be taught in the public schools of the state in educational programs for both hearing and deaf students. Academic credit will be granted for courses in American Sign Language.
<http://ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/C3%20PASS%20WL.pdf>

Oregon*: Yes. ASL is recognized as a foreign language in state legislature. Students can get credit for ASL classes at elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels of study.

Pennsylvania*: Yes. In December 2004, the Pennsylvania State Legislature made American Sign Language a Foreign/World Language. Currently the Bureau of Teacher's Certification and Bureau of Teaching and Learning (Curriculum and Instruction)the State Supervisor's bureau along with the Bureau of Special Education have teamed together to make: Teaching Standards and Teacher Certification Requirements, a Student Academic Standards addendum to be added to the "Proposed Academic Standards for World Languages".
http://www.education.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/World_Languages/7542/

Rhode Island*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized by Rhode Island Public Law 96-151 signed on August 7, 1996 "...as a fully developed, autonomous, natural language with its own distinct grammar, syntax, vocabulary and cultural heritage." Students in elementary, secondary, and higher education systems are able to use coursework in ASL as a credit toward satisfaction of a foreign language course requirement.

South Carolina*: Yes. Section 59-17-120 amends the Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, by adding: The board of trustees of a school district may grant credit as an elective to a pupil who satisfactorily has completed a high school course in American Sign Language.
<http://ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/63/>

South Dakota*: Yes. American Sign Language is hereby recognized as a language under state law SD Coifed Laws Ann. 13-33-17, 1995. Any high school may offer American Sign Language as a for-credit elective pursuant to rules adopted by the State Board of Education. The teaching of American Sign Language is encouraged at the elementary level. Any post-secondary educational institution controlled by the State Board of Regents may offer an elective course in American Sign Language according to policy adopted by the Board of Regents.

Tennessee*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized as a language. Educational programs are encouraged to offer American Sign Language for academic credit.

Texas*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized as a language under state law 49-6-1009. Any public school may offer an elective course in American Sign Language. For the purpose of satisfying any requirement in the public schools for two units of study in another language, a course in American Sign Language may be deemed another language.

Utah*: Yes. Senate Bill 42, passed in 1994, provides that American Sign Language shall be accorded equal status with other linguistic systems in the State's public and higher education systems; and directing the State Board of Education and the State Board of Regents to develop and implement policies and procedures for the teaching of American Sign Language in their respective schools, colleges and universities. <http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/worldlang/>

Vermont*: Yes. American Sign Language is recognized as a foreign language as of 2003. American Sign Language will fulfill student's foreign language requirements in high school and college.

Virginia*: Yes. House Joint Resolution No. 228 was agreed to by the 1996 Virginia General Assembly. The resolution requests public schools and public and private institutions of higher education in Virginia to recognize American Sign Language course work for foreign language credit. A curriculum framework for American Sign Language was developed in 1998 and is available from the department's Web page. New legislation was passed in 2011 requiring Virginia colleges and universities to accept high school credit in American Sign Language to fulfill foreign language entrance requirements. http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/frameworks/sign_language/framework_sign_language.pdf

Washington*: Yes. Pursuant to any foreign language requirement established by the state board of education or a local school district, or both, for purposes of high school graduation, students who receive instruction in American Sign Language shall be considered to have satisfied the state or local school district foreign language graduation requirement. Minimum admission standards will be established for four-year institutions, including a requirement that coursework in American Sign Language shall satisfy any foreign language requirement the board or the institution may establish as a general undergraduate admissions requirement. American Sign Language also qualifies as CTE - Career and Technical Education. It is also possible to earn Competency-Based Credits in world languages for ASL via the SLPI test. <http://www.k12.wa.us/WorldLanguages/Laws.aspx>

West Virginia*: Yes. American Sign Language was recognized as a foreign language during the Seventy-First legislature (1994), Va. Code 18-2-7. On March 16, 2007, the West Virginia Board of Education (WVBOE) approved Content Standards and Objectives (CSOs) for teaching ASL in Policy 2520.18. <http://www.legis.state.wv.us/WVCODE/ChapterEntire.cfm?chap=18&art=2&ion=WVC%2018%20%20-%20%20%20%20-%20%20%207%20%20.htm>

Wisconsin*: Yes. State law 118.017(2) 1991, states that American Sign Language is recognized as a foreign language within the state’s K-16 educational system. School boards in individual districts may grant foreign language credit to a pupil who successfully completes a course in American Sign Language

Wyoming: Yes, but not as state law. American Sign Language has never been proposed to the state legislature. The University of Wyoming offers American Sign Language for academic credit which fulfills the foreign language requirement and is also accepted by the Graduate School. The most formal avenue for credit is through the Hathaway Success Curriculum for a Legislative Scholarship. At this time some community colleges offer ASL for credit but this does not fulfill the foreign language requirement. It is also recognized as credit for K-12.

Special note: District of Columbia is not a state, but has formally recognized American Sign Language through the American Sign Language Recognition Bill of 2001. It was also recently reported by the Modern Languages Association that, “In terms of ranking, Spanish and French still lead as the two most studied languages. American Sign Language (ASL), continuing to experience remarkable growth, especially in undergraduate enrollments, is the language with the third most enrollments, displacing German, which is now fourth (table 1a). ASL enrollments increased by 19.0% between 2009 and 2013.” http://www.mla.org/pdf/2013_enrollment_survey.pdf

References:

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University of New Mexico, “Universities That Accept ASL In Fulfillment Of Foreign Language Requirements”, List maintained by Sherman Wilcox, Ph.D. (ongoing).