Chapter 4: Reading Proficiency Tests in English

In the fall of 1997, TEA began to develop Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE) to be administered to limited English proficient (LEP) students. These tests have been used along with English and Spanish TAAS to provide a comprehensive assessment system for LEP students. The RPTE is given annually to all LEP students in Grades 3–12 until they demonstrate an established level of English reading proficiency.

RPTE test items were field-tested in the spring of 1999, and a study was conducted in the fall of 1999 to finalize issues related to test length and design. The baseline administration of the RPTE took place in the spring of 2000. A second study occurred in the fall of 2000. Data from this study were used to develop a cohesive scaled score system for documenting the annual progress LEP students make as they learn to read in English. The RPTE tests are released every year, and new items are field-tested annually to replenish the item banks.

The impetus for the development of this assessment came from legislation passed in 1995 requiring the commissioner of education to propose a way to evaluate the progress of LEP students who were eligible for exemption from the state-mandated assessment program. The RPTE allows the performance of these students to be measured in a standardized manner across the state so that data can be provided to help evaluate whether second-language learners are making adequate annual growth in becoming proficient readers of English.

In the 1997–1998 school year, TEA issued a request for proposals to select a contractor to provide support services for this test development. NCS Pearson, whose proposal included BETA, Inc., as the subcontractor for item development, was awarded the contract. In May 1998 TEA convened an advisory committee consisting of Texas educators, assessment specialists, and state and national experts in second-language acquisition to provide the test contractors with direction regarding the design and configuration of the assessment.

In the subsequent steps of test development, groups of educators helped identify which TEKS to assess. In addition, educators began to articulate what second-language learners can and cannot read as they progress from one proficiency level to the next. Afterward, the test contractor, in collaboration with TEA staff, developed prototype test items. Texas educator committees reviewed these prototypes and provided the necessary input to allow the test developer to draft a large number of items for field-testing. Additional committees of educators reviewed the field-test items before and after field-testing and determined which items were appropriate on actual tests. Finally, before implementing RPTE in the spring of 2000, TEA conducted a field study to determine the appropriate length of the tests and configuration of test items. Numerous districts from the previous spring's field test assisted with this study by administering pilot test forms and providing input.

The RPTE was constructed with items from each of three levels of proficiency—beginning, intermediate, and advanced. Following the spring 2000 baseline administration, statistical analyses were performed to determine the range of raw scores representing each level. Subsequent reviews by educators and psychometricians concluded that these ranges appropriately identify reading proficiency levels. The table on the following page shows the test-score ranges from the spring 2000 baseline administration. An equating process is used to ensure that the subsequent tests maintain the same levels of difficulty as the baseline tests.

RPTE Test	Proficiency Rating		
	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced
Grade 3	0–37	38–47	48–56
Grade 4–5	0–37	38–47	48–56
Grade 6–8	0–39	40–48	49–57
Grade 9–12	0–39	40–49	50–60

The RPTE results are used in conjunction with results from TAAS in English and Spanish to monitor the progress of second-language learners. Beginning in spring 2003, the RPTE will be used in conjunction with the English and Spanish versions of the new state assessment program, TAKS. The way the RPTE is used in the state assessment system is described below.

- The RPTE is used to monitor the English-language development of students who qualify for a LEP exemption from TAAS or TAKS. Students who achieve a score of advanced on the RPTE are not eligible for an exemption in subsequent years.
- The RPTE is used to monitor the English-language development of LEP students who take TAAS or TAKS in Spanish.
- The RPTE is used to monitor the English-language development of LEP students who are not eligible for an exemption from TAAS or TAKS in English but who have not yet achieved an advanced rating on the RPTE.
- LEP students stop taking the RPTE after they achieve a rating of advanced.

The Association Between RPTE and TAAS—Spring 2002, 2001, and 2000

Each spring a large number of the state's LEP students have taken both the RPTE and TAAS tests in English. The table on the following page shows the relationship between these students' performance on RPTE and TAAS for the spring 2002, 2001, and 2000 administrations. For each year the table shows the cross tabulation of students' mean TLI scores by TAAS grade with their RPTE proficiency ratings.

Inspection of this table reveals that in most cases the mean score for all students earning an advanced proficiency rating on RPTE was above the TAAS passing standard, which is a TLI of 70. The mean TLIs were below 70 at Grade 7 in 2000, 2001, and 2002 and slightly below 70 at Grade 6 in 2002 and the exit level in 2001.

2002, 2001, and 2000 TAAS TLI Performance by RPTE Proficiency Level for Students Who Responded to Both Assessments Each Year

		2002		2001		2000	
Grade	**RPTE Proficiency Level**	**N-count**	**TLI Mean**	**N-count**	**TLI Mean**	**N-count**	**TLI Mean**
3	Beginning	1818	48.80	2556	52.33	3004	47.75
	Intermediate	6708	64.74	8325	68.19	6712	65.95
	Advanced	26254	82.64	22440	83.33	22108	83.11
4	Beginning	1034	52.64	1429	52.71	1974	49.83
	Intermediate	4037	64.78	4844	65.53	5995	64.59
	Advanced	9014	79.51	6883	79.83	17091	83.57
5	Beginning	510	53.16	619	50.54	1021	48.63
	Intermediate	2198	60.80	3040	59.36	3719	57.45
	Advanced	7139	76.41	7515	74.71	17576	77.13
6	Beginning	462	51.81	1226	50.55	1972	49.84
	Intermediate	1705	54.96	2702	56.07	4583	58.62
	Advanced	4855	69.20	4500	70.48	14495	74.34
7	Beginning	386	49.76	883	51.41	1175	47.54
	Intermediate	1329	52.52	2159	56.89	3084	54.28
	Advanced	4230	66.65	5247	69.71	11600	68.79
8	Beginning	254	55.94	552	49.65	756	51.26
	Intermediate	904	56.62	1369	56.56	1766	56.21
	Advanced	3600	71.05	4451	70.86	11116	72.51
Exit	Beginning	937	53.28	1097	49.16	1338	48.86
	Intermediate	1556	61.01	1728	55.31	2242	57.71
	Advanced	3380	73.72	4234	68.36	7931	72.23
Total	Beginning	5401	51.39	8362	51.31	11240	48.91
	Intermediate	18437	61.78	24167	62.60	28101	60.79
	Advanced	58472	77.90	55270	77.23	101917	77.28