

CHAPTER 4: TEXAS ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT SYSTEM (TELPAS)

Overview

Title III, Part A of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires states to conduct annual statewide English language proficiency assessments that measure the progress limited English proficient (LEP) students in kindergarten through twelfth grade make in learning the English language. In accordance with NCLB, these assessments must assess four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

To meet these federal requirements, the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) was developed. This assessment system consists of the Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE), which have been administered in Texas since the 1999–2000 school year, and new assessments called Observation Protocols, which were administered as benchmarks in the 2003–2004 school year. This assessment system will be used to show the extent to which Title III-funded districts and the state as a whole meet federal English language proficiency accountability measures.

RPTE Development

The impetus for the development of the Reading Proficiency Tests in English came from state legislation passed in 1995, which required the commissioner of education to propose a way to evaluate the progress of LEP students eligible for exemption from the state-mandated assessments. After seeking input from national experts and state stakeholders, the commissioner proposed to develop a test that would measure the progress LEP students make annually in learning to read in English. Such a test would not only be useful for measuring student progress in the state reading curriculum but would also provide educators with valuable information about how well English learners were able to understand the written English used across content areas and on the state assessments.

RPTE enables Texas schools to monitor whether LEP students are making steady annual progress in English development during the time they qualify for an exemption from TAKS. RPTE has been carefully designed to assess what LEP students can read and comprehend at distinct stages of learning English. Educators who understand the stages of second language development are better able to help English learners progress from one stage to the next. Educators are also able to use this information to adapt instruction.

In May 1998 TEA convened an advisory committee of Texas educators, assessment specialists, and state and national experts in second language acquisition to provide direction regarding the design and configuration of the assessment.

In subsequent steps of test development, groups of educators helped identify which TEKS student expectations to assess. In addition, national consultants as well as Texas bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) teachers articulated what second language learners can and cannot read and understand as they progress from one stage of language development, or proficiency level, to the next. Afterward, the testing 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, which were field-tested in the spring of 1999. Additional committees of educators reviewed the field-test items before and after the field test and determined which items were appropriate for inclusion 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.

RPTE tests are developed for each of the following grade clusters: Grade 3, Grades 4–5, Grades 6–8, and Grades 9–12. Each RPTE test is constructed with items that assess the characteristics and abilities associated with three levels of second language reading proficiency—beginning, intermediate, and advanced. Following the spring 2000 baseline administration, statistical analyses were performed to determine the range of raw scores representing each proficiency level. Subsequent reviews by educators and psychometricians concluded that these ranges appropriately identified the stages of language development assessed. The table below shows the raw-score ranges from the spring 2000 baseline administration. An equating process is used to ensure that subsequent tests maintain the same levels of difficulty as the baseline tests.

Table 4. RPTE Raw-Score Ranges and Proficiency Levels

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

The final step in developing the RPTE assessments was a scaling study conducted in the fall of 2000. This study generated data used to develop a cohesive scaled score system for documenting the students’ annual progress.

New RPTE test items are written annually, reviewed by Texas educators, and field-tested in the spring of each school year as part of the ongoing test development needed to support annual test construction and the release of these tests to the public.

RPTE's Role in the State Assessment Program

RPTE is used in a number of ways in the Texas assessment program. These assessments help schools monitor whether recent immigrant students are making steady progress during the time they may qualify for a LEP exemption from other state assessments. RPTE also provides valuable diagnostic information about the English development of LEP students who are not eligible for an exemption and who participate in English or Spanish versions of state assessments.

RPTE was developed originally to align with the previous state assessment program, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). As of spring 2004, RPTE more closely reflects the design of TAKS reading selections and test questions. As such, RPTE provides a strong content link to the Texas curriculum and TAKS assessments.

More information about the RPTE test design and test items can be found in the following resources, which are available on the Student Assessment Division website.

- *Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE) Educator's Guide to TEKS-Based Assessment*
- *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program*

A revised version of the *Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE) Information Booklet* will be available on the Student Assessment website in fall 2004.

Relationship Between Performance on RPTE and TAKS in Spring 2004

Since the implementation of RPTE in 2000, during each spring's test administration, a large number of the state's LEP students take both RPTE and TAKS in reading or English language arts. State policy requires LEP students to take both assessments when they have not yet attained a rating of advanced on RPTE but are no longer eligible for a LEP exemption.

The table on the following page shows the relationship between these students' performance on RPTE and the TAKS reading/English language arts tests.

Table 5. 2004 TAKS Scale Score Performance by RPTE Proficiency Level for Students Who Participated in Both Assessments

			English TAKS Scale Score Reading/ELA
Grade	RPTE Proficiency Level	N-Count	Mean
3	Beginning	963	1903.97
	Intermediate	5728	2018.64
	Advanced	32749	2241.94
4	Beginning	352	1903.05
	Intermediate	2216	1949.28
	Advanced	6757	2083.23
5	Beginning	295	1776.27
	Intermediate	1810	1836.99
	Advanced	6807	1965.50
6	Beginning	460	1826.99
	Intermediate	1604	1878.31
	Advanced	4053	2010.59
7	Beginning	379	1811.03
	Intermediate	1093	1847.60
	Advanced	3003	1965.90
8	Beginning	302	1822.94
	Intermediate	826	1870.77
	Advanced	2564	2001.40
9	Beginning	1236	1899.95
	Intermediate	1686	1920.95
	Advanced	3382	2021.84
10	Beginning	577	1939.53
	Intermediate	1226	1975.15
	Advanced	2786	2034.83
11	Beginning	227	1897.89
	Intermediate	531	1938.44
	Advanced	734	2021.97

Future Plans for RPTE

To fulfill NCLB requirements, several changes are planned for the RPTE assessments.

- Beginning with the spring 2005 RPTE administration, an “advanced high” proficiency rating will be reported on RPTE. The advanced high rating will identify those students who perform at the upper end of the advanced range on the tests.
- In the 2004–05 school year, committees of Texas educators will be convened to help design a second edition of RPTE and develop prototype test items. The new edition of RPTE will add a second-grade test, expand the academic contexts in which English language proficiency in reading is measured, and include an advanced high proficiency level that will reflect more fully the reading levels required in the subject areas assessed through TAKS.
- The new edition of RPTE will be field-tested in spring 2006 and implemented in spring 2007.

Observation Protocols

Title III, Part A of NCLB mandates that states conduct annual assessments to demonstrate the progress of LEP students in kindergarten through Grade 12 in the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In accordance with these requirements, TEA developed observation protocols that allow teachers to holistically rate each LEP student’s English language proficiency in these domains based on classroom observations and daily interaction with the student. The protocols are designed to reflect an overall level of English language acquisition and are not an assessment of isolated skills. RPTE will continue to be used to assess the domain of reading in Grades 3–12. The observation protocols were implemented in spring 2004 to measure the other domains and grades, as shown below.

- Grades K–2 listening, speaking, reading, and writing
- Grades 3–12 listening, speaking, and writing

For the administration of the observation protocols, school districts identified their K–12 LEP students and designated teachers to observe and rate the students’ English language proficiency. For each domain, teachers were trained to use proficiency level descriptors to determine the level at which each student performed most consistently. Raters assigned students one of four proficiency ratings for each domain assessed: beginning, intermediate, advanced, or advanced high. The appropriate rating was then indicated on individual student rating documents. A complete description of the ratings for each observation protocol is available on the Student Assessment Division website.

Materials for administering the observation protocols were developed by PEM in cooperation with TEA. A training of trainers overview session was held March 1, 2004, for school district and education service center personnel, and observation protocols for close to 600,000 LEP students were completed during the April 12–May 14, 2004, testing window. District, campus, and student reports were provided at the beginning of the 2004–2005 school year.