

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

Overview

Title III, Part A of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 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 the Texas Observation Protocols (TOP), which were benchmarked in spring 2004 and implemented fully in spring 2005. This assessment system is used to show the extent to which districts and the state meet federal Annual Measurable Achievement Objective (AMAO) accountability indicators. Composite ratings, rather than individual language domain ratings, are used in the AMAO accountability measures. For information on how the TELPAS composite ratings and composite scores are generated, see Appendix 27.

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 in other content areas and on the state assessments.

The Reading Proficiency Tests in English enable 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.

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 RPTE.

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.

The Reading Proficiency Tests in English 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. Spring 2000 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

The Reading Proficiency Tests in English are used in a number of ways in the Texas assessment program. These assessments help schools monitor whether recent immigrant students are making steady progress in English reading proficiency 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 the state assessments.

The Reading Proficiency Tests in English were 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) Information Booklet*
- *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program*

2004–2005 RPTE Policy Changes

Prior to the 2004–2005 school year, RPTE did not assess the upper range of second language development in reading. English language learners who reached the advanced RPTE proficiency level in a given year did not take RPTE in subsequent years. The TAKS tests were used to determine whether LEP students had attained the full range of English reading skills expected at their grade level. To fulfill NCLB requirements for annually assessing the English language proficiency in reading of all LEP students, the state of Texas implemented two RPTE policy changes in the 2004–2005 school year.

- 1) LEP students are now required to take RPTE annually. LEP students who score at the advanced level on RPTE will continue to take RPTE annually until they meet the state criteria for reclassification as non-LEP.
- 2) An advanced high RPTE proficiency rating was provided with RPTE test results.

The advanced high rating enables RPTE to show whether LEP students who demonstrated performance at the advanced level in a previous year are continuing to make progress in second language acquisition. In setting the advanced high cut scores on RPTE, the following goals were considered.

- The advanced high rating should identify English language learners who need minimal second language acquisition support when reading grade-appropriate texts.

- There should be a strong relationship between the RPTE advanced high rating and the Met Standard level of performance on the TAKS reading and English language arts tests.

Several options were considered when proposing cut scores for the advanced high proficiency category for the spring 2005 administration of RPTE. These included setting the cut scores:

1. halfway between the cut score for the advanced proficiency level and the top of the scale (maximum scale score attainable on the 2005 test);
2. three-fourths of the way between the cut score for the advanced proficiency level and the top of the scale; or
3. at the scale score for which the predicted TAKS score is just above 2100 (i.e., predicting passing TAKS).

As part of the evaluation, the impact of setting different scale score cuts was investigated. Specifically, the percent of students who would have been placed in the advanced high proficiency category had it existed in previous years and how those students performed on TAKS the following year was noted.

An English language learner (ELL) focus group that advises the Texas Education Agency on LEP student assessment matters reviewed the data and collaborated with the test contractor and agency staff in establishing the final cut scores. Appendix 28 provides the technical information associated with establishing the advanced high RPTE cut scores.

Relationship Between Performance on RPTE and TAKS in Spring 2005

Every spring a large number of LEP students take both the RPTE and the TAKS reading or English language arts tests. The table on the following page shows the relationship between the performance of LEP students on both assessments. It is important to keep in mind that a small number of recent immigrants qualify for a limited English proficiency exemption from TAKS during their initial years in the U.S. and that some LEP students in Grades 3–6 take Spanish versions rather than English versions of TAKS. Included in the following table are only those nonexempt LEP students who took both RPTE and the English versions of TAKS.

Table 5. 2005 TAKS Scale Score Performance by RPTE Proficiency Rating for Students Who Participated in Both Assessments

TAKS Grade	RPTE Proficiency Rating	N	Mean TAKS Reading/ELA Score
3	Beginning	997	1911.14
	Intermediate	5221	2015.99
	Advanced	11270	2140.40
	Advanced High	24407	2304.33
4	Beginning	299	1856.46
	Intermediate	1943	1931.14
	Advanced	11072	2053.11
	Advanced High	12190	2221.17
5	Beginning	179	1833.02
	Intermediate	1072	1845.11
	Advanced	7998	1957.62
	Advanced High	14626	2109.95
6	Beginning	243	1859.72
	Intermediate	1298	1901.46
	Advanced	12240	2023.93
	Advanced High	10110	2186.62
7	Beginning	225	1826.17
	Intermediate	1059	1860.75
	Advanced	8396	1962.94
	Advanced High	7295	2097.98
8	Beginning	142	1817.13
	Intermediate	661	1846.65
	Advanced	5803	1932.01
	Advanced High	7313	2080.78
9	Beginning	1095	1860.38
	Intermediate	2500	1907.86
	Advanced	9110	2013.68
	Advanced High	4099	2133.71
10	Beginning	577	1911.06
	Intermediate	1416	1954.26
	Advanced	6494	2024.84
	Advanced High	3781	2104.89
11	Beginning	299	1929.21
	Intermediate	887	1965.66
	Advanced	4794	2041.42
	Advanced High	3713	2139.69

Second Edition of RPTE

A second edition of RPTE is being developed to add a Grade 2 assessment and more fully align the RPTE advanced high proficiency level with the reading levels required in core content areas of the Texas curriculum. The second edition of RPTE will address NCLB Title III goals for evaluating whether English language learners develop the academic English language proficiency that enables them to understand and process the language encountered in mathematics, science, and social studies reading materials.

In the 2004–2005 school year, educator committees convened to review the proposed assessment objectives, TEKS student expectations, and prototype items for the redesigned assessment. The prototype test items were piloted in spring 2005. In summer 2005, Texas educators convened to review the prototype items in conjunction with the student performance data gathered during the pilot. Using information from the pilot, the test developer generated large numbers of items that will be field-tested in spring 2006.

The second edition of RPTE is expected to be administered as an online assessment. A study of issues related to online testing for the Grade 2 assessment is planned for spring 2006. An online field test of the items for Grades 2–12 is planned for spring 2007, and the new edition of RPTE will be implemented in spring 2008.

Texas Observation Protocols (TOP)

Title III, Part A of NCLB mandates that states conduct annual English language proficiency 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 the Texas Observation Protocols (TOP) to assess the domains and grade levels not already assessed through RPTE.

RPTE assesses the domain of reading in Grades 3–12. TOP measures the other domains and grades, as shown below. Together, these assessments comprise the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS).

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

TOP was developed by TEA in collaboration with test development contractors, bilingual/ESL consultants, and members of an English language learner focus group composed of teachers, bilingual/ESL directors, assessment directors, campus administrators, and university professors. TOP is aligned with the Texas academic content and achievement standards and draws upon second language acquisition research, research-based standards, the experience of Texas practitioners, and observational assessment processes used in other states. TOP allows teachers to holistically rate each LEP student's English language proficiency based on classroom observations and daily interactions with the student.

TEA chose to implement an observation protocol assessment instrument for a number of reasons.

- This assessment method, which is integrally linked with sound classroom instructional practices, has the potential for making a significant, positive impact on student learning. The training teachers receive in the holistic rating and classroom observation process helps them better understand and meet the needs of English language learners.
- TOP does not require annual field testing.
- The administration of TOP does not require students to lose instructional time.
- TOP does not have the logistical drawbacks associated with tape-recorded or individually administered speaking and listening assessments required by other types of English language proficiency tests.

For the administration of TOP, school districts identify their K–12 LEP students and designate teachers to observe and rate the students' English language proficiency. TOP is designed to capture an overall level of English language acquisition and is a holistically scored assessment rather than an assessment of isolated skills. Teachers are trained to use holistic rating rubrics called TOP Proficiency Level Descriptors to assign one of four proficiency ratings—beginning, intermediate, advanced, or advanced high—in each domain assessed. The ratings are submitted to the state's testing contractor, and performance reports are generated and sent back to school districts. The TOP Proficiency Level Descriptors are available on the Student Assessment Division website.

TOP raters received holistic rating training through a training-of-trainers model. In February 2005 a training session was held for lead trainers from school districts and education service centers. The training materials included annotated examples of student performance and authentic student writing samples for use in training raters to apply the holistic rating rubrics.

As part of the rating process, TOP raters collected student writing samples. Following the TOP administration, a state audit of the writing samples was conducted to examine the effectiveness of the training and application of the holistic rating rubrics. A report on this state audit is included as Appendix 4.

TOP ratings for approximately 615,000 English language learners were assigned during the March 21–April 8, 2005, TELPAS testing window. District, campus, and student TELPAS reports indicating TOP and RPTE performance were provided by the test contractor in May 2005.

