

## Item 8:

### Discussion of English Language Proficiency Requirements

#### DISCUSSION AND UPDATE

**SUMMARY:** This item provides the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) an opportunity to discuss the English language proficiency requirements in Texas Administrative Code as well as the use of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to measure that proficiency. This item also provides Texas Education Agency staff an opportunity to update the Board on stakeholder feedback and next steps.

**STATUTORY AUTHORITY:** The statutory authority to specify certification requirements is Texas Education Code §21.031(b) and §21.041(b)(4)-(5).

**PREVIOUS BOARD ACTION:** The SBEC approved the passing standard on the Test of Spoken English (TSE) in May 2001. The SBEC approved the passing standard on the TOEFL in May 2006.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND JUSTIFICATION:** Under current SBEC rules related to educator certification (19 TAC §230.11(b)), which were approved for adoption by the SBEC in June 2012, became effective August 12, 2012, and were recently amended effective December 27, 2016, any applicant for a Texas educator certificate must “be able to communicate, listen, read, write, and comprehend the English language sufficiently to use it easily and readily in daily communication and teaching.” Applicants may demonstrate English proficiency in one of three ways as specified below:

- Completion of an undergraduate or graduate degree at an accredited institution of higher education (IHE) in the United States;
- If an undergraduate or graduate degree was earned at an IHE outside of the US, including territories of the US, evidence must be provided that the primary language of instruction was English; or
- Verification of satisfactory scores on an English language proficiency examination approved by the SBEC.

The previous rule under §230.413, Subchapter M focused on an applicant’s ability to “speak and understand the English language sufficiently to use it easily and readily in conversation and teaching.” Therefore, testing focused only on assessing an individual’s oral English proficiency. In May 2001, the SBEC approved a passing standard of 50 on the TSE to meet this requirement. When TOEFL replaced the prior English proficiency test in 2006, the SBEC approved a passing standard of 26 on the speaking portion only, which paralleled the requirements of the prior test. Even though candidates are only held accountable for the speaking portion of the examination, they are assessed on all four areas of the TOEFL: Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing.

The TOEFL test measures the ability of non-native English speakers to use and understand the English language as it is heard, spoken, read and written in the university classroom. Each section of the test has specific tasks as follows:

- Reading: Read three or four passages from academic texts and answer questions.
- Listening: Listen to lectures, classroom discussions and conversations, then answer questions.
- Speaking: Express an opinion on a familiar topic; speak based on reading and listening tasks.
- Writing: Write essay responses based on reading and listening tasks; support an opinion in writing.

During the test, individuals are asked to perform tasks that combine more than one skill, such as:

- Read, listen, and then speak in response to a question.
- Listen and then speak in response to a question.
- Read, listen, and then write in response to a question.

When the Board set the minimum satisfactory score at 26 on the speaking section of the TOEFL in 2006, there were discussions to revisit the decision and determine whether to set a minimum score for each section of the test, or set a minimum total score. With staff turnover through the years, these decisions have never been brought back to the SBEC for consideration.

At the December 2016 SBEC meeting, the SBEC discussed the English language proficiency requirements in rule and the use of the TOEFL to measure that proficiency. SBEC directed TEA staff to provide additional information on the TOEFL test, to gather stakeholder feedback, and to bring back recommendations to the SBEC. In particular, the Board directed staff to gather input from stakeholders on:

- 1) using all four parts of the TOEFL in determining English language proficiency;
- 2) cut score recommendations on each section and/or an overall averaged score; and
- 3) which candidates should be required to take the exam.

TEA staff solicited names of stakeholders from SBEC members to provide input. The stakeholder meeting will be conducted on February 23, 2017, and TEA staff will provide a summary of stakeholder feedback at the March SBEC meeting. Potential rule changes would be presented to the Board at a future SBEC meeting.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** An assessment of fiscal impact can be made after the SBEC gives guidance to TEA staff.

**PUBLIC AND STUDENT BENEFIT:** Ensuring that Texas certification applicants demonstrate English proficiency is imperative to the success of the students they will instruct and support, especially very young students and English language learners.

**PROCEDURAL AND REPORTING IMPLICATIONS:** An assessment of procedural and reporting implications can be made after the SBEC gives guidance to TEA staff.

**LOCALLY MAINTAINED PAPERWORK REQUIREMENT:** An assessment of locally maintained paperwork requirements can be made after the SBEC gives guidance to TEA staff.

**Staff Members Responsible:** Marilyn Cook, Director  
Educator Certification and Testing

Tim Miller, Director  
Educator Preparation

Becky McCoy, Manager  
Educator Certification and Testing

Jennifer Perez, Program Specialist  
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- Attachments:**
- I. Statutory Citations
  - II. Overview of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

**ATTACHMENT I**

**Statutory Citations Related to Discussion of English Language Proficiency Requirements**

**Texas Education Code §21.031, Certification of Educators (excerpt):**

- (b) In proposing rules under this subchapter, the board shall ensure that all candidates for certification or renewal of certification demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to improve the performance of the diverse student population of this state.

**Texas Education Code, §21.041. Rules; Fees (excerpt):**

- (b) The board shall propose rules that:
  - (4) specify the requirements for the issuance and renewal of an educator certificate;
  - (5) provide for the issuance of an educator certificate to a person who hold a similar certificate issued by another state or foreign country, subject to Section 21.052;

**ATTACHMENT II****Overview of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)**

**Summary:** The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) measures the ability of non-native English speakers to use and understand English as it is heard, spoken, read, and written in the college or university classroom. For SBEC purposes, the TOEFL is used for two groups: 1) for individuals certified out of country to demonstrate English proficiency to receive a Texas certificate if the primary language of instruction was not English and 2) for educator preparation programs to make admission decisions for individuals who earned their degrees at institutions where the primary language of instruction was not English. Although the test requires individuals to complete all four parts, the only section that has a required performance standard is Speaking, which SBEC has set at 26.

**Background on TOEFL:**

- Administered by Educational Testing Service (ETS).
- Provides institutions with information to determine the English language proficiency level of potential students, candidates, employees, or licensure recipients.
- Uses integrated tasks to measure the following skills:
  - Reading: measures the ability to understand academic reading material written in English (60-80 minutes; 36-56 questions)
  - Listening: measures the ability to understand spoken English as it is used in colleges and universities (60-90 minutes; 34-51 questions)
  - Speaking: measures the ability to speak English in an academic context (20 minutes; 6 tasks)
  - Writing: measures the ability to write in English in a way that is appropriate for college and university course work (50 minutes; 2 tasks)
- Each part has a score range from 0-30 with proficiency designations as follows:

Reading	Listening	Speaking	Writing
High: 22-30 Intermediate: 15-21 Low: 0-14	High: 22-30 Intermediate: 15-21 Low: 0-14	Good: 26-30 Fair: 18-25 Limited: 10-17 Weak: 0-9	Good: 24-30 Fair: 17-23 Limited: 1-16

- All test takers take all four parts of TOEFL, but a passing score (26) on the Speaking section is all that is required for Texas certification.
- A cut score of 26 was set by SBEC in May 2006 based on the recommendation of a committee composed of educators knowledgeable of the first oral proficiency test that was used (i.e., TSE), familiar with teaching requirements in Texas, and experienced with teachers whose first language was not English.