Agenda Topic: Language Proficiency Tests for New Bilingual Teachers—Passing Scores

Materials: Summary of Test Development and Passing Score Recommendation Process

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Purpose of Agenda Item

To set the passing standards for the new language proficiency tests required of applicants seeking either a Transitional Bilingual Teaching Certificate or a bilingual approval or endorsement on an existing certificate. The first administration of these tests was conducted July, 2001.

Expected Outcome(s) of Agenda Item

The Board will set the passing score for the new language proficiency tests.

Background Information

As required by recent legislation, new tests that assess the speaking, reading, writing and grammar language proficiency of applicants seeking either a transitional bilingual certificate or a bilingual approval or endorsement on an existing certificate have been developed. This includes an English Language Proficiency Test and tests in 14 target languages.

Whether an applicant for a bilingual certificate, endorsement or approval must successfully complete the English Language Proficiency Test or a test in the target language is determined by the language of instruction at the university from where the individual’s degree was earned. If the degree was received from a university where English was the primary language of instruction, then the applicant must take the target language proficiency test in the appropriate language. If the degree was earned from a university where the target language was the primary language of instruction, then the applicant must take the English Language Proficiency test.
Fourteen committees of Illinois bilingual teachers and college faculty who prepare bilingual teachers and who are proficient in one or more of the 14 target languages were extensively involved in the development of the target language tests. Representatives of these committees participated in a passing score review process which resulted in passing score recommendations.

A Coordinating Committee, comprised of representatives of each target language committee, assisted in the development of the English Language Proficiency test and the passing score recommendation for that test. (See attached list of committee members.) After the first administration of the tests, the test contractor prepared data showing the percentage of examinees passing the tests at the recommended scores and at points above and below those recommendations.

The State Teacher Certification Board reviewed the committee passing score recommendations and the projected passing rate data. Based upon that review, the State Teacher Certification Board recommends to the State Board of Education:

- The passing score for the Target Language Proficiency Test—Spanish be set at the Committee recommendation.
- The passing score for the Target Language Proficiency Tests Other than Spanish be set at the Committee recommendation.
- The passing score for the English Language Proficiency Test be set for
  - Reading at minus one Standard Error of Measurement below the committee recommendation.
  - Writing at “5”
  - Oral at “5”

The State Teacher Certification Board requested that staff report on the pass rates after each test administration. Further, the STCB recommends to the State Board of Education that the passing scores be reexamined after the completion of one year of administration of the new tests.

Data showing the passing rates at the committee recommended passing scores will be presented for the Board’s review. Staff and Dr. John Silvestro, Senior Area Director for National Evaluation Systems, will be available to respond to Board member questions.

Policy Implications

The implementation of these new language assessments makes Illinois’ language proficiency requirements more rigorous and raises the standard for bilingual teachers. Candidates for bilingual certification must now demonstrate language proficiency in reading, writing, grammar and speaking. Previously candidates were not required to demonstrate language proficiency in writing. Also, we have noted that basic skills examinees, whose first language is not English, have experienced difficulty with the essay portion of the test in which they must demonstrate mastery of English language grammatical skills.
Further, it is important to note that while the STCB recommendation for the English Language Proficiency passing score is lower than the original committee recommendation, the recommendation for the oral portion of the test is higher than the standard required under the previous proficiency tests. Therefore, the STCB’s recommendation results in raising the English speaking ability standard for Illinois bilingual teachers.

The question of how these new Illinois requirements compare to other states is difficult to answer. It is important to note that Illinois is one of the few states that requires bilingual teachers educated in a language other than English to demonstrate English language speaking ability. While some states require bilingual teaching candidates to pass a basic skills test, they do not require those individuals to demonstrate speaking ability.

Caution should be used in interpreting data based upon small numbers of examinees. The small number of examinees taking the English Language Proficiency Test may not be reflective of the performance of examinees in the future.

Superintendent’s Recommendation

Accept the recommendation of the State Teacher Certification Board for the setting of the passing scores for all assessments with the exception of the English Language Proficiency assessment. I recommend the Board accept the recommendation of the assessment committee for the written portion of this examination (a score of 6), and the State Teacher Certification Board recommendation for the oral portion (a score of 5). It is further recommended that at the end of the first administration year, the pass rates be shared with the Board and the passing scores revisited if warranted.

Next Steps

Pass rates will be examined by staff after the September, December and March test administrations and discussed with members of the State Teacher Certification Board for possible recommendation for action by the State Board of Education.
Recently enacted legislation required the State Board of Education, effective July 1, 2001, to implement new tests for assessing the speaking, reading, writing and grammar skills of applicants for the Transitional Bilingual Certificate (TBC). To implement this requirement effectively and efficiently, these new assessments were developed and are being administered as part of the existing certification testing program, the Illinois Certification Testing System (ICTS).

The following fifteen language proficiency tests have been developed.

- English Language Proficiency Test
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Spanish
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Arabic
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Cantonese
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Greek
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Gujarati
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Hindi
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Japanese
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Korean
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Lao
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Mandarin
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Polish
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Russian
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Urdu
- Target Language Proficiency Test – Vietnamese
Test Development

The content of the tests is based on Illinois policies, standards, and documents with respect to bilingual education. The following is a summary of the test development process.

The development of the assessments was a multi-staged process that involved Illinois educators at each stage in the test process, including sixteen committees of individuals. Those committees are:

- A Content Advisory Committee (CAC) for each of the 14 target languages, comprised of public school bilingual teachers of the target language and Illinois college faculty who prepare such teachers;
- A Coordinating Committee (CC), comprised of representatives of the target language committees (CAC’s).
- The ICTS Bias Review Committee (BRC), comprised of Illinois public school personnel and college faculty with expertise in, sensitivity to, issues of bias.

Test development began with the drafting of test frameworks that define the knowledge and skills that would be assessed by the tests. The draft frameworks were then reviewed for bias and content-related issues by the BRC and the CC and revised as necessary. These revised frameworks were formatted into a content validation survey and were distributed to Illinois public school bilingual educators and college faculty who prepare bilingual teachers. The respondents rated the importance of the objectives to the job of a transitional bilingual teacher. Following the content validation survey, multiple-choice and constructed-response test items were developed to assess the knowledge and skills identified in the validated set of objectives.

The BRC, the CC and the 14 CAC’s reviewed the test items for bias and content issues and the items were revised as necessary. The committees also reviewed the proposed performance characteristics and score scale. The items were field tested at bilingual teacher preparation programs to gather data on the performance of the test items. Field test responses to the constructed-response assignments were used to evaluate the items and to select marker responses for use in scorer training for operational test administrations.

Test Blueprint

Each of the language proficiency tests has three subareas: Reading, Writing and Speaking. The following is an explanation of the number and types of items for each of the subareas of the assessments.

Reading. The English Language Proficiency test and the Spanish Target Language Proficiency test each have 55 multiple-choice items which assess reading. Forty-four of those items are scorable, so the maximum score for reading on the English Language Proficiency test and the Spanish Target Language Proficiency test is 44.

For the Target Language Proficiency tests other than Spanish, reading is assessed by two constructed-response items. The items consist of two reading passages followed by nine questions regarding each passage. The raters assess the overall response to a passage with a score from 0-4. Each of those two items has a total raw score of 8 points, four points from each of two raters. Therefore, the maximum score for reading on the Target Language proficiency test is 16.
The English Language Proficiency test and each of the 14 target language tests have one scorable constructed-response item for assessing writing. The writing constructed-response item has a total maximum score of 8 points, four points from each of two raters.

The English Language Proficiency test and each of the 14 target language tests have one scorable constructed-response item for assessing speaking. The speaking constructed-response item has a total maximum score of 8 points, four points from each of two raters.

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The following chart depicts the number and type of items per each test and the weight given each subarea.

**Passing Score Recommendation Process**

The development of the passing score recommendation was a multi-stage process. Members of the target language committees participated in a Passing Score Review Meeting and followed a systematic process for collecting their professional judgments as to the passing scores for each test. Committee members were trained to identify the language knowledge and skills required of those seeking a transitional bilingual certificate in Illinois to perform successfully in Illinois classrooms.

Committee members had the opportunity to practice providing judgments and to revise their ratings after examining their own ratings and the ratings provided by other judges in their field. Then, each committee member independently provided a holistic passing score recommendation for each test component.

**Reading Comprehension for English Language Proficiency and Target Language Proficiency – Spanish (Multiple-Choice Items)**

Following the discussion of the language knowledge and skills required of bilingual teachers, committee members for the English Language Proficiency test and the Target Language
Proficiency – Spanish test rated multiple-choice items on a practice test. Practice test item ratings were reviewed in conjunction with the concept of what the required knowledge and skills are to perform successfully in the classroom. Following the practice test, committee members then worked independently in providing Round One passing score recommendations for each Reading multiple-choice item.

Committee members for the English Language Proficiency test and the Target Language Proficiency – Spanish test then participated in Round Two passing score recommendations for Reading. In this part of the meeting committee members were provided with the results of their Round One multiple-choice item passing score recommendations and were given the opportunity to review the Committee-based Round One median of the item ratings. Committee members then each independently provided a holistic passing score recommendation for the Reading multiple-choice items.

**Constructed-Response Items. Writing Proficiency and Oral Proficiency for all Language Proficiency Tests and Reading Comprehension for the Target Language Proficiency Tests--Other Than Spanish**

For the constructed-response assessments, committee members determined the level of response, as defined by the scoring scale that would be made by candidates meeting the necessary language requirements on each constructed-response test component.

For each constructed-response component, committee members read the assignment and considered how they would answer the assignment. This assisted committee members in understanding the knowledge and skills needed to respond to the assignment. Committee members also reviewed the performance characteristics and scoring scale for each type of constructed-response assignment. Committee members read or listened to the marker responses that represented the performance characteristics that define each score point as described in the four point scoring scale. Then each committee member independently made a passing score recommendation by selecting the score point that would be achieved by candidates meeting the language requirements.

**Data Analysis**

Subsequent to the Passing Score Review Conference and the first test administration, the testing contractor prepared data to determine the effect of various raw score points for each test component upon each of the test pass rates. These data were presented to the State Certification Board at its August 10, 2001 meeting. The STCB reviewed the committee recommend passing scores and the data. Based upon that review, the STCB presents its recommendations to the State Board of Education who will set the passing score.