UPDATED March 20, 2008 FINAL RECOMMENDATION

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING
March 20, 2008

TO: Illinois State Board of Education

FROM: Christopher A. Koch, Ed.D., State Superintendent of Education
Connie J. Wise, PhD, Assistant Superintendent
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Agenda Topic: English Language Learners Assessment Recommendation

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Purpose of Agenda Item:
To provide the State Board with a plan for assessing English Language Learners (ELLs) for Title I accountability purposes.

Relationship to/Implications for the State Board’s Strategic Plan:
This agenda item is directly linked to Goal 1 and Goal 3.
GOAL 1: Enhancing Literacy;
GOAL 3: Expanding Data-Informed School Management & Support Practices

Expected Outcome(s) of Agenda Item:
The Board will have an understanding of agency staffs’ recommendation for proceeding in relation to assessing ELLs for Title I accountability purposes.

Background Information
The Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English (IMAGE) was first administered to English Language Learners (ELLs) as an English language proficiency assessment in spring 1997, prior to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Starting with the passage of NCLB, all states were required to have the same high expectations and academic standards apply to all public school students. Further, all state assessments had to align to those reading and mathematics standards. In an attempt to meet those requirements, Illinois began using IMAGE as the content-based assessment for ELLs who had been identified as being eligible to receive services through transitional bilingual education programs/transitional programs of instruction (TBE/TPI). IMAGE was given to those ELLs instead of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT), which is given in grades 3 through 8, and the Prairie State Achievement Examination (PSAE), which is taken in grade 11. Furthermore, it is important to note that simultaneously IMAGE was used to fulfill the NCLB requirement that ELLs’ English language proficiency also be assessed.

NCLB requires every state’s assessment system to be approved for use for accountability purposes through a Peer Review process. During Illinois’ first Peer Review process in June 2006, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) noted problems with IMAGE’s alignment with the Illinois Learning Standards and its comparability to ISAT and PSAE. The ED did not, at that time, indicate that IMAGE was not remediable, nor direct us to stop using the test. Over the next year and a half, ISBE attempted to work with the ED on resolving the issues that had been identified by the Peer Review process. However, despite our efforts, we were unsuccessful at meeting these alignment requirements. In October 2007, the ED notified Illinois that it could no longer use IMAGE for NCLB accountability purposes. If IMAGE continued to be used, Illinois risked sanctions by the federal government, including limiting the state’s flexibility under NCLB and the withholding of federal funding. Neither of these were acceptable consequences.
Given the timing of the final decision by the ED, Illinois did not have an opportunity to develop a new ELL content-based assessment prior to the 2008 testing cycle. Since all students must be tested, after consultation with the ED, individuals familiar with educating ELLs, and individuals with experience in test development and the Peer Review process, ISBE determined that the only feasible option Illinois had for testing in 2008, and probably extending into 2009, was to assess ELLs through the ISAT and PSAE with accommodations. This practice of having ELLs participate in the accountability system through the “general” assessment is widely followed across the country. Approximately 60,000 students, roughly 5% of the total number of students assessed, would no longer take IMAGE. This decision was communicated to school districts and the public.

Since the announcement, ISBE and the Board have heard from individuals, districts and organizations regarding administering ISAT and PSAE to the ELL population. The concern was expressed that even with accommodations, ISAT and PSAE results would be unreliable and invalid, yielding little useable information as to how ELLs were performing. ISBE has consulted with other states and nationally recognized assessment experts on approaches to assessing ELLs. In fact, the Board heard from three assessment experts at the February meeting. Most recently, staff participated in a Research to Action Forum sponsored by REL Midwest and its partners. The focus for the Illinois team, which was comprised of practitioners, policy makers and researchers, was on ELL assessment for accountability purposes. The facilitator for the session was Dr. Edynn Sato who is the director of special populations for the Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center, a federally funded national center that is collaboration between WestEd and the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST). She is also the director of research and English language learner assessment for the Assessment and Standards Development Services division at WestEd.

A common theme throughout all of these discussions was that ISBE should proceed in a methodical and systematic process in relation to the assessment of ELLs. Developing another “band-aid” approach would be unacceptable. Rather ISBE was encouraged to engage in thoughtful, data-based decision-making. The recognition of its obligation to develop the best assessment system possible is balanced by another equally important need to demonstrate ISBE’s continued commitment to the education of its ELL students. Relying on all that we have heard and learned, we have developed a plan that honors both of these needs. Providing options for students, so that assessment can mirror instructional practice as much as possible, is recognized as a key component of the Illinois assessment system. The proposed plan involves the ongoing development of a triad of options: accommodations, linguistic modification and translated/transadapted forms of the assessments. It is important to note, however, that the intent is to implement these options thoughtfully and methodically through a graduated process.

Although initially it was thought that the 2009 assessment options for ELLs would be identical to those provided in 2008, we are pleased to present a plan that will allow for implementation of some components as early as spring 2009.

For the PSAE 2009 administration, ISBE recommends the following:

1. Continue with the 2008 accommodations which will be available to all ELLs in program years 1-5 and at any English proficiency level. ISBE will conduct a survey to gather information on teachers’ perception of the usefulness and recommendations for improvement of the 2008 accommodations and make adjustments accordingly.

2. Translate the 2009 PSAE mathematics and science sections into Spanish, which will be appropriate at least for students with an English proficiency level ranging from 0 to 3.9 and who have been in the TBE/TPI program for 1 to 3 years. Students in districts which
have established higher English proficiency levels for exiting, ranging from 4 to 5.9, and who have an additional two years of program eligibility may also benefit from a translated test. To accomplish this, ISBE needs to determine the delivery method (reader script/audio, unilingual, side-by-side) with vendor and field input. Additionally, ISBE will need to determine the translation process and which dialect it will use.

As ISBE initiates the process of the translation/transadaptation of its assessments, we recognize the need to develop our capacity, both internally and across the state. Building and fostering a network of bilingual individuals who have experience in item development, item review, and the content areas will be critical during this first step in including translated/transadapted forms of ISBE’s assessments in its system. This network will serve as the foundation as ISBE moves forward in the extension of this process.

Along with increasing capacity, the actual process for developing the translated form of the assessment will need to be determined. As Illinois has committed to providing quality assessments to its students and, fundamentally, this is to serve as one of its means of satisfying the requirements of NCLB, meeting technical requirements is a must. Practices will need to be put into place and studies will need to be conducted to ensure the translated form of the PSAE is valid. ISBE must be able to demonstrate that the translated form of the assessment has construct maintenance, content alignment, and score comparability to the English form of the PSAE. The skills and knowledge being measured must remain the same and the scores have to be able to be interpreted in the same manner.

By the end of the 2008-2009 school year and the completion of one PSAE testing cycle, ISBE should have built enough capacity, established appropriate processes and procedures, and developed adequate validity plans to evaluate its ability to utilize the translation/transadaptation process confidently in future years.

For the ISAT 2009 administration, ISBE recommends the following:

1. Continue with the 2008 accommodations which will be available to all ELLs in program years 1-5 and at any proficiency level. ISBE will conduct a survey to gather information on teachers' perception of the usefulness and recommendations for improvement of the 2008 accommodations and make adjustments accordingly.

2. Linguistically modify the mathematics and science portions of the ISAT, making them accessible to students with English language proficiency levels ranging from 0 to 3.9 and who have been eligible for ELL programming for 1 to 3 years. Students in districts which have established higher English proficiency levels for exiting, ranging from 4 to 5.9, and who have an additional two years of eligibility for programming, may also benefit. Linguistically modified assessments are not easier than their counterparts. Rather, they are simply more accurate in their measurement of the content being assessed. Linguistic modification reduces or eliminates unnecessary complex language that interferes with students’ abilities to demonstrate content knowledge. In addition to language changes, visual and/or graphic support may be incorporated. This process will create an assessment with items similar to what had previously been used in IMAGE. The significant difference with this assessment is that alignment will be enhanced. How to incorporate the SAT 10 items in this modified assessment will need to be determined with field input and the vendor. This linguistically modified and visually/graphically enhanced form of the assessment will also require validity studies to ensure construct maintenance, content alignment and score comparability.
3. Translate/transadapt short answer and extended response items for mathematics.
4. Allow for translation of students’ native language responses for short answer and extended response items for both mathematics and reading, which will benefit those students with an appropriate level of native language proficiency. With field input, establishing a protocol and translator qualifications to ensure standard implementation of this process will need to be developed.

In preparation for making decisions regarding future ELL assessment options, ISBE should complete the following activities during the 2008-2009 school year:

- Develop a means of collecting information on native language proficiency, especially in content area language, and develop a means to compare that to students’ English language proficiency
- Review the ongoing inclusion of mathematics and reading short answer and extended responses as part of the assessment system for all students
- Examine the initial data from the Intended and Unintended Consequences Research Project, a 5 year project examining several different aspects of the Illinois assessment system, including its consequences at the student, school and district level
- Evaluate the PSAE translation process and technical requirements
- Participate in the ON-PAR Mathematics grant, a project developing an on-line mathematics assessment for ELL students

Possible additional ISBE activities starting in 2008-2009 could include the development of: content-based translated glossaries to be used for instructional purposes throughout the school year, professional development materials for the use of assessment results, and guidance on the appropriate use of formative assessment techniques at the classroom level to gather additional student-specific data.

Analysis and Implications for Policy, Budget, Legislative Action and Communications

Policy Implications: Illinois is committed to providing quality assessments for its ELLs that meet the requirements of NCLB. By engaging in thoughtful, data-based decision-making in choosing how to proceed beyond the 2009 assessment, while also providing additional accommodations that include translation and linguistically modified assessment forms, the Board best demonstrates its commitment to the education of Illinois’ ELL population.

Budget Implications: We do not have bids on the suggested activities and products at this time. Informal conversations have provided inconsistent projections. However, we do know that development costs are expected to increase, as are materials and production costs. The data capturing, capacity building and validity activities will also require significant additional funding.

As a starting point, we estimate a cost of $67,000 for translation and development of the PSAE in Spanish. Should we decide to follow the example set by the only other state translating ACT and WorkKeys items, additional production costs of $7.00/DVD (estimated need of 2200 = $15,400) or $15/VHS (estimated need of 2200 = $33,000) should be expected. Other materials, scoring, reporting and shipping would be at additional costs. For the linguistic modification of the ISAT, a projected estimate of $50,000 per grade level can be used as an initial reference point; but should be interpreted extremely cautiously. Again, additional materials, scoring, reporting and shipping would be at additional cost.
There will also be costs associated with the following:

- Development of other accommodated materials, such as glossaries
- Capacity building
- Validation studies
- Survey development

The proposed plan is intended to fall within the total increase allocation for ELL assessment proposed in ISBE’s 2009 budget.

The recommendations included in this proposal require one additional FTE in assessment.

**Legislative Action:** None expected at this time.

**Communication:** One of the concerns we have heard over the course of the last few months is the desire of the field to be better informed and to have more input into directions the agency may choose to take. We have attempted to be more responsive to that request in recent months with the active encouragement to the Illinois English Language Learner Assessment Advisory Committee (IELLAAC), the Illinois Advisory Council for Bilingual Education (BAC) and other community-based and professional organizations to provide input through committee meetings, in writing and directly to the board. As we move forward, the continued participation of the IELLAAC, BAC, districts and other stakeholder groups will be critical. Assistance in investigating research, what other states are doing, and what is happening in Illinois classrooms will be an ongoing need. The additional support of organizations such as the REL Midwest Center and the Assessment and Accountability Center should also enable Illinois to make the most well-informed decisions it can.

When decisions are made, they need to be shared through our standard communication channels (superintendent’s bulletin, assessment listserv, ELL listserv, coordinator e-mail blasts and press releases), but we also need to be sure to utilize organizations, such as LEND, to assist in conveying the message. Additionally, we will be updating the members of the General Assembly. We need to ensure that the people working most closely with these students, the teachers are informed, and we will be asking the unions to assist with that effort.

**Pros and Cons of Various Actions**

One of the cautions we must heed is not try to do more than we realistically can. Illinois has had the experience of both engaging in development activities that have resulted in invalid assessments and having its system overwhelmed to its detriment. One of the advantages to the above plan is that it thoughtfully allows for all three options to be implemented at one level or another in 2008-2009. The lessons learned during the next year should serve ISBE well as they are applied more widely in future years.

One of the benefits to pursuing the presented plan for PSAE is that the current assessment can be used to investigate the process and procedures for translation/transadaptation with the students who have the highest probability of having the most years of education in their native language. It is expected that although fairly new to education in English, many of the students eligible for ELL programming as 11th graders will have participated in instruction in their native language outside of Illinois.
Using the Spanish form of the PSAE will be a state-allowed accommodation; it is not an ACT approved one. Students using the Spanish version, while receiving a PSAE score, will NOT receive an ACT reportable score. Of course, students would have the option of choosing to take the English PSAE rather than the translated PSAE in order to obtain an ACT reportable score.

At the ISAT level, even for 2009, all three options (accommodations, linguistic modification and translation/transadaptation) are represented in one way or another. The linguistically modified form will be available for the widest range of ELLs in terms of language groups, English proficiency levels and years in TBE/TPI programming. As an additional significant advantage, that form will be available for other students (i.e. students with language disabilities) to use. It may even serve as the basis for an alternate assessment for those students referred to as the 2%. ISBE’s experience with this form of the assessment will be extremely beneficial as we move forward and its familiarity to the field may be reassuring. In addition, Illinois already has some validity evidence of its process to modify ISAT items making them more accessible to the ELL population. The conclusion of the study conducted when ISAT items were first incorporated into IMAGE was that the adaptations made to the items resulted in items that were fair to the ELL population and were fully comparable to the original versions in terms of precision and skills assessed.

Although only a starting point, the ISAT plan for 2009 does allow for new native language accommodations. It is expected that the option of translating students’ short answer and extended responses for mathematics and reading will be valued as a means of making those items more accessible.

The state will be making significant strides in its assessment of its ELLs, while at the same time allowing the required time to gather additional data and information to inform future development. In addition, the quality development and beginning validation of one additional assessment form for grades 3-8 and another for grade 11 is feasible. To attempt to do more would put the state at risk.

The BAC had one additional recommendation: the development of a Spanish academic achievement test aligned to the Illinois Learning Standards and the Illinois Spanish Language Arts standards. This recommendation was especially geared for those ELLs participating in dual language or two-way immersion programs in which 50% of the instructional day may be in Spanish. Given increasing implementation of dual language programs across the state, the future creation of a Spanish language arts assessment would be very useful for program evaluation and other accountability purposes in these instructional settings.

Superintendent’s Recommendation
I recommend that the following motion be adopted:

The State Board of Education directs staff to implement the revised plan (dated 3-20-08) developed for assessing ELLs for Title I accountability purposes.

Next Steps
Should the Board endorse the presented plan, staff will need to proceed quickly in contracting for the required services. Work toward linguistically modifying the ISAT mathematics and science and translating the PSAE mathematics and science would need to begin immediately. Additionally, we will widely communicate the plan as described above.