

**ISBE SUPERINTENDENT'S
TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS
ON
LEP STUDENT ALTERNATIVE
ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS**

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ISBE Superintendent's Task Force Recommendations on LEP Student Alternative Assessment Systems

Introduction

In 1991, a committee of educators was established to make recommendations to the Illinois State Board of Education on how to best meet the needs of special student populations in the context of the new Public School Recognition Process. As part of their report, they recommended that limited English proficient (LEP) students enrolled in state approved bilingual education programs participate in the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) after one year of enrollment. Many practitioners and advocates believed that this requirement was not in the best interest of LEP students. After vigorous and passionate debate, Senator Jesus Garcia introduced legislation during the spring of 1993 which repealed this requirement.

On August 5, 1993, Governor Jim Edgar signed P.A. 88-192. As a result, any LEP student enrolled in a state approved bilingual education program was exempted from the IGAP for three years. This law also legislated a "Task Force of concerned parents, teachers, school administrators and other professionals" be appointed to "assist in identifying alternative assessment programs." Consequently, in the fall of 1993, the State Superintendent of Education charged a State Task Force for LEP Student Alternative Assessment with the responsibility of developing recommendations for assessing the learning of LEP students within the context of the Illinois Public School Accreditation System and recommending an alternative assessment system for these students.

This Task Force was comprised of 20 members representing diverse backgrounds and the constituencies specified in the law. The members were very interested in receiving input from the field and accommodated this interest by opening all meetings to the public. A number of school district representatives attended the meetings regularly and were important contributors and resources throughout the process. During the past five months, the Task Force considered major research findings and other states' experiences before establishing key guiding principles which influenced the recommendations listed herein.

Via these recommendations, the Task Force seeks to provide a framework which emphasizes the interdependence of both the local and the state assessment. As the State works to improve the quality of education for all students of Illinois, the assessment system must be one that affords every student, regardless of linguistic background, be given a full and fair opportunity to measure what has been achieved.

This report is divided into five sections: 1) Guiding Principles, 2) Recommendations for Language Proficiency Assessment, 3) Recommendation for Math, Science and Social Science Assessment, 4) Recommendation for Professional Development and Evaluation, and 5) Alternative Assessment Plan Summary.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Task Force kept in mind a number of key considerations as they developed the recommendations for an alternative assessment system for LEP students enrolled in Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) programs or Transitional Programs of Instruction (TPI). These underlying principles are critical for the future success of any of the recommendations contained herein.

- Since the Illinois School Accreditation Process seeks to determine that all students are learning, the state assessment system undergirding the accreditation process must provide information on the educational status of LEP students. This information must be meaningful and accurate and at the same time meet the needs of stakeholders at all levels.
- The performance of all LEP students should be assessed in a manner which is consistent with student needs and state and local standards.
- The assessment system for LEP students must be tied to the local school improvement plan which identifies the learning outcomes, standards and expectations of the school.
- The assessment system for LEP students must provide schools with the necessary data to determine when a student should participate in IGAP (if that student has been in a TBE/TPI program for fewer than three years).
- Appropriate assessment of LEP student performance requires multiple, valid and reliable alternative assessments that can accommodate English language proficiency. The Task Force has defined the reading and writing components of English language proficiency to parallel the IGAP Language Arts assessments in reading and writing.
- The assessment system for LEP students must include measures of English language proficiency and academic achievement that are reliable, valid, and culturally fair.
- The assessment system for LEP students must accommodate each student's previous academic experience in English and his/her native language.
- The assessment system for LEP students must reflect the existing diversity of instructional approaches in bilingual education programs.
- It is essential that continued state and local support for training, evaluation and professional development be a requisite for effective implementation of any assessment system.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT

Fundamental Question Considered:

How can schools assess the English language proficiency growth of limited English proficient students so that valid and reliable information can be provided to all stakeholders?

Recommendation #1

ISBE shall develop, through a collaborative process, qualitative and quantitative performance standards to describe the English language proficiency of LEP students in grades K-12 in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A collection of exemplary model rubrics (descriptive rating scales) of developmental stages of language proficiency based upon current language acquisition theory shall be made available for schools to use as part of the Illinois Public School Accreditation Process. School districts will have the option to select a rubric from the exemplary models to use for instructional, administrative purposes and the monitoring process of the ISBE Bilingual Section.

Discussion:

The development of language occurs in stages during which predictable language behaviors can be identified. An understanding of this process is fundamental to the design of a program of assessment. To date, no uniform, consistent mechanism exists at the state level to collect, evaluate and report language proficiency data. The performance standards and the rubrics will establish benchmarks which will allow for interpretation of multiple measures used by schools to determine language proficiency growth of LEP students in TBE/TPI programs. Schools will be able to utilize data from multiple measures for school improvement planning and provide the state with meaningful data. This will also give schools the opportunity to attain meaningful data on students who transfer from one school to another.

Recommendation #2

ISBE shall develop/select and administer a standardized reading and writing English language proficiency assessment instrument to all TBE/TPI students exempted from the IGAP in grades 3-12. The results will be reported by student, school, district, and state in the same way as the IGAP results are reported for students in the general program of instruction.

Discussion

The English language proficiency instrument being recommended will serve as the appropriate, parallel measure to the IGAP Language Arts assessment. Growth in English language proficiency is the anchor variable that tells how well students in TBE/TPI programs are performing. For LEP students, language proficiency is a prerequisite to language arts achievement. Furthermore, some theorists suggest that language proficiency is the single most reliable predictor of achievement in mainstream classrooms.

An annual assessment of English language proficiency is already mandated under 14C of the School Code. However, the results of this assessment are not utilized for school accountability. To date no standardized mechanism exists at the state level to collect, evaluate and report language proficiency data. The Task Force understands the need to develop a single standardized procedure for reporting information on English language proficiency growth that will be meaningful to all stakeholders.

The Task Force recommends a single measure of language proficiency (in the areas of reading and writing) be administered to TBE/TPI students in grades 3-12. These results will be reported to the public as part of the School Report Card according to the number of years the student has been in an approved TBE/TPI program.

If ISBE is to contract with an outside source to administer and score this assessment two conditions should be met:

1. That the assessment be administered to all TBE/TPI students in grades 3-12 who are exempted from the IGAP. In this way, districts could be released from the financial responsibility of purchasing and scoring a standardized reading and writing English language proficiency instrument as currently prescribed in the ISBE Bilingual Regulations.
2. The arrangement should be long term to provide consistent data for longitudinal analysis.

The Task Force strongly embraces the notion that multiple information sources are important for making individual decisions about individual students. However, the equally unquestionable need to provide valid, reliable and understandable information and the need for accountability of LEP students leads us to recommend a statewide assessment instrument for the area of English language proficiency (reading and writing).

Recommendation #3

ISBE shall reinforce established guidelines and provide technical assistance to districts to assist them in determining the native language proficiency of students upon entry into the district. Schools may utilize the exemplary model rubrics (Recommendation #1) of language proficiency to assist them in determining the native language proficiency background of students.

Discussion:

Assessment of native language proficiency skills is essential at the time of entry into school for determining an appropriate educational program of instruction for the student. The Task Force concluded that the ISBE established guidelines for districts should be enforced and that ISBE should assist districts in implementing appropriate assessments of native language proficiency.

Fundamental Question Considered:

How can schools assess content area achievement of LEP students so that assessments are consistent with what (and how) students are learning and at the same time provide consistent information for accountability and school improvement?

Recommendation #4:

ISBE shall develop a description of performance assessments for the IGAP benchmark grades including performance definitions and a standard rubric matched to the existing IGAP performance definitions for math, science and social science. The Local Education Agency (LEA) will develop its alternative assessment system for LEP students to conform with these ISBE developed standards. These alternative assessments can be administered in English or the native language as appropriate.

Discussion:

The Task Force believes that achievement in math, science and social science is also a critical part of the assessment framework for LEP students. We have struggled, nonetheless, with how to best guarantee that LEP students be assessed appropriately given the diversity of program approaches and languages used in our TBE/TPI programs. After careful consideration of all the alternatives (including translating existing assessments into non-English languages), the Task Force strongly agrees that the proposed recommendations will contribute to math, science and social science assessment in an appropriate manner.

The proposed content area assessment offers a strong combination of accountability and flexibility for schools and will become part of the local assessment framework. The Task Force determined that to do otherwise would require mandating another standardized norm referenced assessment which would, by necessity, have to be translated into a variety of languages or serve only a limited number of students. The data to be collected through the recommended system must become a part of the data evaluated by ISBE -- both as a part of its "Quality Review Process" and as part of any ISBE Bilingual Section parallel.

With respect to flexibility, we believe that the proposed framework offers a workable solution to the "over assessment" nightmare school personnel fear. The emphasis on performance based assessments aligned with performance definitions will be part of the local assessment framework. If implemented carefully, these assessments can serve as a catalyst for improved instruction. Additionally, these efforts should lead to careful alignment of the curriculum in TBE/TPI programs with the Illinois State Goals for Learning. The emphasis on student performance places an appropriate emphasis on what students can do rather than which language "they can do it in".

Recommendation #5

ISBE shall continue to make available to all districts appropriate, adequate and ongoing professional development and evaluation information emphasizing assessment strategies aligned with the recommendations of the Task Force.

Discussion

Professional development is a requisite for implementation of any of the proposed recommendations contained in this report. Schools and staff need to be equipped to design, implement and utilize a proposed alternative assessment system. Since 1972, the Illinois Resource Center, as the technical assistance arm of the ISBE Bilingual Section, has provided extensive professional development in regard to the many issues of instruction of LEP students. During the past several years the Illinois Resource Center has had a leading role in helping teachers and schools develop alternatives to standardized testing for the assessment of LEP students. The Task Force suggests that professional development and evaluation can be accomplished through the following means:

- ISBE shall reallocate funds to provide professional development opportunities and research in the area of LEP student assessment.
- ISBE shall require district expenditures of state bilingual dollars for professional development in the area of assessment.
- ISBE shall direct the IRC and the Chicago Public Schools to continue to focus professional development and research efforts in the area of LEP student assessment.
- ISBE shall develop and implement an evaluation plan pertinent to the needs of LEP students in Illinois.
- ISBE shall investigate the utilization of and collaboration with state institutions of higher education for research efforts pertinent to the needs of LEP students.

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT PLAN SUMMARY

The alternative assessment plan is recommended for schools and districts with students participating in TBE/TPI programs who are exempt from the IGAP. The purpose of the plan is to document LEP student achievement during their period of exemption from the IGAP. This process will systematize collecting, analyzing, evaluating and reporting data for LEP students in Illinois in a meaningful and appropriate manner.

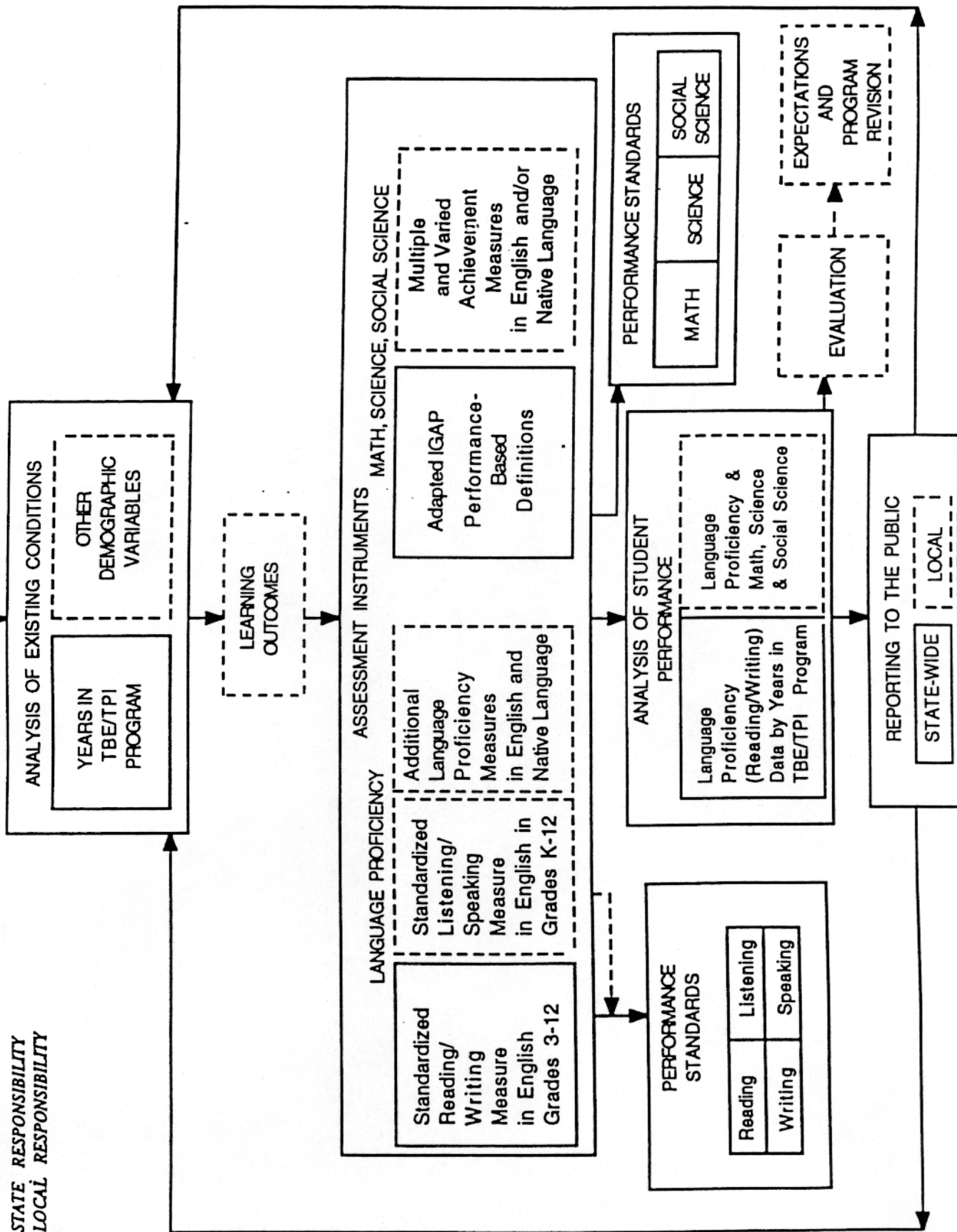
At the state level, the analysis of existing conditions will yield data which delineate the number of years of student participation in a TBE/TPI program. A state-wide language proficiency measure in reading and writing for grades 3-12 will document student progress in literacy development. Results will be reported by years of participation in a TBE/TPI program, by grade level, by school and state wide. In addition, performance based definitions and standards for math, science, and social science will be delineated for IGAP benchmark grades.

At the local level, autonomy will be built into the system. This accommodation will allow schools flexibility in the identification of additional demographic variables, the selection of additional language proficiency measures, and the development of other achievement indicators. Schools will determine the appropriateness and use of native language assessments.

Assessment information on listening and speaking will be collected and interpreted locally through exemplary model rubrics to be developed by ISBE. These descriptive rating scales will delineate performance standards that will facilitate uniform and consistent interpretation of LEP students' oral language development over time. Results will be used locally for evaluation purposes, adjustment of expectations, and program revisions.

STATE GOALS FOR LEARNING

— STATE RESPONSIBILITY
 - - - - LOCAL RESPONSIBILITY



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