



Building Capacity to Promote College- and Career-Readiness for English Language Learners—A Fact-Finding Trip to Austin, Texas

Glossary of Key Terms

English Language Learners (ELL):

Individuals living in the United States who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English and do not speak English as their primary language can fall under the category of having Limited English Proficiency (LEP), or being English Language Learners (ELLs). Other terms commonly found in literature include bilingual learners, English as a second language (ESL) students, language minority students, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD).

Bilingual Education:

Bilingual education refers to academic content instruction in both English and the ELLs' primary language, which aims to establish an academic foundation in both languages. Transitional programs aim to teach ELLs enough language skills to be placed in mainstream courses as soon as possible, while long-term programs aim to develop full bilingualism and biliteracy. Two-way dual-language immersion programs refer to mixed classrooms of fairly equal numbers of native speakers of two languages, in which all students are expected to learn both languages. One-way dual language immersion programs support one language group, such as students whose primary language is Spanish, to become bilingual and biliterate.

English as a Second Language (ESL):

ESL programs prioritize English language acquisition through instruction primarily in English, with little or no use of the students' native language. Students may receive full-time ESL instruction with certified ESL teachers, or may be pulled out of their classes to meet with an ESL specialist for specific periods during the school day.

Federal Policy

Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAO):

The No Child Left Behind Act's (NCLB) Title III requires states to define annual measurable achievement objectives (AMAOs) to measure and report on progress toward the attainment of English proficiency and academic achievement standards for ELLs. States must develop AMAOs in three target areas: progress in English language acquisition, exiting or reaching English language proficiency, and achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the ELL subgroup. The law also requires states to hold local education agencies accountable for meeting increasing AMAO targets for English language proficiency over time.

English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards:

The implementation of English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards in each state was essential to complying with NCLB's requirements for states to align the goal of second language acquisition with the standards and expectations of each subject in the required curriculum. In the language acquisition domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, ELP standards are benchmarks that suggest the sequence of expected learning outcomes for ELLs at different levels of English proficiency and by progressive grade clusters.

Texas Systems of Instruction and Assessment

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS):

The TEKS comprise the state-mandated K-12 curriculum that establishes the required skills and objectives for all Texas students in each academic subject.

Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS):

The TAKS is the state-mandated standardized test that annually assesses student proficiency in reading, writing, math, and social studies skills in primary and secondary schools as delineated in the TEKS. TAKS was created before NCLB, but it does comply with this law. In 2007, TEA introduced and an accommodated version of the TAKS (Accommodated) to assess ELLs that allows modification of the testing environment or of the test itself, and ELLs in grades 3-5 may be allowed to take the TAKS in Spanish. In order for seniors in Texas to be eligible to receive a high school diploma, they must pass the exit-level TAKS tests in English-Language Arts, math, science, and social studies. Students are given five chances to pass the test throughout their junior and senior years of high school.

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR):

STARR is the new statewide assessment system that will replace TAKS beginning in 2013. STARR will be used for the 12 end-of-course assessments mandated by the state legislature in 2007 and the new grade 3-8 assessments required by House Bill 3 in the 2009 legislative session. The new tests will be significantly more rigorous than previous tests and will measure a child's performance, as well as academic growth. The grade 3-8 STAAR tests in reading and mathematics, by law, must be linked to the foundational knowledge required for the English III and Algebra II end-of-course assessments taken at the high school level.

Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS):

The TELPAS is the annual standardized test by which Texas evaluates the progress their K-12 ELL students make in attaining the English language proficiency. The ratings are determined by testing the four domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; then students are designated a proficiency level of Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, or Advanced High, which are not grade-specific. The TELPAS reading assessment was revised in 2008 to reflect a stronger cross-curricular focus on academic English skills, particularly in the language used for math and science.

Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC):

Every public or charter school district in Texas is required to form an LPAC. The LPAC is the mechanism by which districts identify, annually review, monitor, and exit ELLs on an individual student basis. Determination of the appropriate assessment – TAKS, TAKS (Accommodated), or TAKS in Spanish - is made by the LPAC based on each student's instructional supports and current level of functioning. LPACs must be made up of professional personnel and at least one parent of an ELL student participating in a bilingual or ESL program; districts offering bilingual education must also include a professional bilingual educator, a transitional language educator/ ESL teacher, and a campus administrator in the LPAC.

Texas Recommended High School Program

Texas has instituted a college-preparatory course load, the Texas Recommended High School Program (RHSP), as the state's default curriculum for all students. This curriculum requires students to complete 24 credits distributed among the major disciplines. Beginning with the class entering ninth grade in 2004 all students are automatically enrolled in the RHSP, unless parents explicitly opt out of this curriculum for their students. The RHSP was revised in 2007-2008 to include 4 credits of mathematics and 4 credits of science, along with the existing requirement of 4 credits in English.

Relevant Legislation

House Bill (HB) 1:

The 79th Texas Legislature passed HB 1 in 2006, a bill that related to public school finance, property tax relief, and public school accountability and programs. HB 1 supported the state's goals of closing achievement gaps by incorporating college-readiness standards into curricula, emphasizing college-going culture in all schools, calling for joint K-12 and higher education cooperation, increasing funding for additional dropout prevention and college-readiness programs, and creating a P-16 College Readiness and Success Action Plan.

House Bill (HB) 3:

HB 3 is an omnibus accountability that sought to bring Texas' curriculum, accountability and promotion requirements into alignment with each other with college- and career-readiness. It ensured that assessments given in grades 3-8 are aligned with the foundational knowledge required for end-of-course assessments in high school.

Agencies and Programs

Texas Education Agency (TEA):

TEA is the branch of the state government responsible for public primary and secondary education. Serving as head of TEA is Commissioner of Education Robert Scott, who was appointed by Governor Rick Perry to his post in 2007. TEA is headquartered in Austin and maintains 20 regional support offices which oversee more than 1,200 school districts and charter schools.

Education Service Center (ESC):

Texas school districts are organized into twenty regions that are served by ESCs, governing bodies that provide a layer of institutional support between TEA and LEAs. The ESCs do not have regulatory authority over the districts, but rather provide support in the form of professional development, technical assistance, and capacity-building. ESC Region XIII serves the Austin area, a total of sixty school districts. For ELL programs specifically, Region XIII's services include teacher training and technical assistance in the areas of effective language programs, Title III program administration, and curriculum modifications for bilingual/ESL/Title III programs.

Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL):

Created in 1999 by WestEd's Teacher Professional Development Program, QTEL is a whole-school reform model that increases the capacity of all teachers to support the linguistic, conceptual, and academic development of ELLs. The initiative provides teachers with a rigorous academic framework and support system through sustained work with schools, districts, and open enrollment institutes. QTEL also develops and pilot tests instructional materials and conducts studies of teacher professional development and interventions for ELLs. In the 2007-08 academic year, AISD initiated a partnership with QTEL to focus on redesigning ELL instruction at the high school level funded by the high school redesign grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.