

STUDY OF  
POSSIBLE  
EXPANSION  
OF THE  
ASSESSMENT  
SYSTEM FOR  
LIMITED  
ENGLISH  
PROFICIENT  
STUDENTS

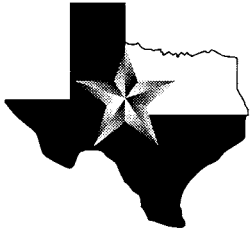
*A Report to the  
77th Texas Legislature  
from the  
Texas Education Agency  
December 1, 2000*

*Submitted to the Governor,  
Lieutenant Governor,  
Speaker of the  
House of Representatives,  
and the members of the  
Seventy-Seventh  
Texas Legislature*

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# TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY

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Jim Nelson  
Commissioner of Education

December 1, 2000

The Honorable George W. Bush, Governor of Texas  
The Honorable Rick Perry, Lieutenant Governor of Texas  
The Honorable Pete Laney, Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Members of the 77<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature

Section 39.022 of the Texas Education Code requires the commissioner of education to conduct a study to determine the need to expand the assessment system to include the assessment in Grades 7 and 8 of limited English proficient (LEP) students whose primary language is Spanish and other students who are of limited English proficiency.

This report presents the research activities that were conducted and the findings of the study. Throughout the study, the need to expand or modify the assessment system for LEP students was considered not only in view of the current assessment requirements but also in light of the upcoming, more rigorous assessment system mandated by the 76<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature. All students will need to demonstrate higher levels of achievement under the new testing program, and test scores will play a major part in decisions about whether to promote or retain students. It is especially important when considering the assessment system for LEP students that the tests measure their skill levels appropriately and allow decisions about their promotion to be based on valid, reliable, and equitable assessment information.

Based on the findings of the study, my recommendations are as follows:

- Continue to administer Spanish versions of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) at Grades 3 through 6, but do not expand the assessment system to include Spanish versions at higher grades.
- Reconsider the law that limits the exemption of LEP students from TAAS to one year, and use performance on the Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE) as a vehicle for measuring TAAS readiness.

I am pleased to submit this report for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Nelson  
Commissioner of Education

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# Project Overview

In 1999 Texas legislation was passed requiring the commissioner of education to conduct a study to determine the need to expand the assessment system for limited English proficient (LEP) students. Through a process of competitive bidding, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) contracted with Beck Evaluation & Testing Associates, Inc. (BETA) to carry out the activities needed for the study.

The specific legislative charge for the study is as follows:

“The commissioner of education shall conduct a study to determine the need to expand the assessment system under Subchapter B, Chapter 39, Education Code, as amended by this Act, to include the assessment in grades seven and eight of students whose primary language is Spanish and other students who are of limited English proficiency as defined by Section 29.052, Education Code.”

During the 1999 legislative session the need for this study arose from discussions about appropriate ways to include all LEP students in the Texas assessment system. Concern was expressed about the number of students exempted from the assessment system and the need to lower this number to better promote the academic achievement of Texas students. As a result, a bill was passed that significantly limited exemptions from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and mandated the administration of reading proficiency tests in English to all LEP students. From discussions during the legislative session, it became clear that the study should explore whether to add Spanish versions of TAAS at Grades 7 and 8, given that Spanish versions of TAAS are currently available only in Grades 3 through 6. The legislation also requires the study to examine the assessment requirements for LEP students whose primary language is other than Spanish.

The research for this study has therefore revolved around two main questions:

- 1) Should Spanish versions of TAAS be added at Grades 7 and 8?
- 2) Should any other changes to the assessment system be made for Spanish-speaking LEP students or LEP students with a primary language other than Spanish?

In considering possible modifications to the assessment system, the overriding goal has been to ensure that LEP students are assessed in a manner that reliably and equitably documents their capabilities. In this manner, the assessments will be useful tools for improving both student learning and the overall effectiveness of Texas schools so that all students have the fullest opportunity to prepare themselves to succeed in their future endeavors.