

Accommodations on Stanford 10 for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students

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Background

Title I of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) was amended by the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) in January 2002. Under NCLB, all students are to be included in the measurement of progress toward state achievement standards. In order to evaluate the progress made by schools toward these standards, states must disaggregate and report the performance of limited English proficient (LEP) students, as well as students with disabilities and disadvantaged students. Furthermore, states must compare the performance of these groups to the performance of the general population and report on the findings. States must also disaggregate and report the performance of LEP students within different ethnic groups.

One of the critical reasons for requiring the reporting of the performance of these groups is to ensure that these students are not left behind as the nation pursues education reform (Elmore & Rothman, 1999). As explained in the *Guidance on Standards, Assessments, and Accountability* (USDOE, 1997), published under the previous version of ESEA, assessments under Title I must provide for:

Inclusion of LEP students, who shall be assessed, to the extent practicable, in the language and form most likely to yield accurate and reliable information on what they know and can do to determine their mastery of skills in subjects other than English. (p. 2)

The *Guidance* specifies that states may use appropriate adaptations and accommodations such as separate testing sessions for LEP students, flexible scheduling, small group administration, simplified directions, audiotaped versions, and native language glossaries.

Terminology

Part of the challenge facing researchers on this topic is understanding the different terms used to refer to students in this population (U. S. Department of Education, 1997). **Non-English-proficient** (NEP) describes a student who has not yet begun acquiring or who is in an initial stage of learning English. **Limited-English proficient** (LEP) is an official term used in federal legislation for students whose proficiency has not yet developed to the point where they can fully participate in an English-only instructional environment.

Accommodations on Stanford 10 for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students

Language minority refers to a native speaker of a language other than English. **English language learner (ELL)** is a term suggested by researchers in the field (Rivera 1997, and August & Hakuta, 1997) as being a more positive alternative to “LEP” or “language minority” student. ELL refers to students whose first language is not English and encompasses both students who are just beginning to learn English and those who have already developed considerable proficiency.

Status of Assessment for LEP Students

The assessment of LEP students’ educational progress has long posed a problem for state departments of education. LEP students have frequently been exempted from state assessments or included inappropriately (e.g., out-of-level tests 4–6 years below actual enrollment) (Rivera, Vincent, Hafner, and LaCelle-Peterson, 1997).

The George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education (CEEE) surveyed state assessment directors in 1994 and found that many of the 44 states responding used only four criteria to exempt students from assessments. The results from this 1994 CEEE study are summarized in Table 1 below:

Criterion Used to Exempt Students from Assessments	States Using (N=44)	Percent of Total
English language proficiency level	27	61
Time in U.S. or school district	20	45
Teacher/administrator recommendations	16	36
Special program participation	15	34

The same study reported that 27 states allowed accommodations. Table 2 below summarizes those findings:

Type of Accommodation	States Allowing (N=27)	Percent of Total
Extra time	22	81
Small group administration	20	74
Flexible scheduling	17	63
Simplified directions in English	15	56
Use of dictionaries or word lists	14	52

The Debate on How Long It Takes to Achieve English Proficiency

Ever since *Lau v. Nichols* (1974), local education agencies and states have had to provide services to limited English proficient (LEP) students. Policymakers have struggled with how long students need these services to achieve English proficiency. Hakuta, Butler, & Witt (2000) drew conclusions in their study about how long it takes to develop oral and academic English proficiency. They define academic English proficiency as “the ability to use language in academic contexts” (Hakuta et al., 2000, Abstract page, para. 2). The findings were that it takes three to five years to develop oral English proficiency and four to seven years to develop academic English proficiency. The LEP student faces a huge challenge in learning not only English, but in learning the academic material as well, while the LEP student’s English-speaking peer continues to develop English proficiency.

The authors of NCLB included these findings in its requirements for academic assessment in English language arts (ELA) (Sec. 1111. [b] [3] [c] [x]). Students must be administered ELA academic tests after 3 consecutive years in school. During years 1–3, states have to provide for the annual assessment of English proficiency (oral language, reading, and writing in English) and report the annual yearly progress. In addition, LEP students still must take the state standards test—the ELA part can be taken in the native language. Pearson continues to monitor USDOE guidance on the assessment of LEP students.

Effects of Accommodation on LEP Student Scores

Hafner (2000) looked at the effect of accommodations on mathematics scores. Simplified directions were found to be beneficial to LEP students. Albus, Bielinski, Thurlow, & Liu (2001) looked at the use of a monolingual simple dictionary for LEP students on a reading test. Those students with intermediate or better linguistic skills had statistically significant better test results, while the accommodation for the limited English proficient student with poor proficiency did not benefit. While the two studies add to the literature, more robust studies must be conducted on the use of the other categories of test accommodations. The future research should include variables such as verifying levels of proficiency (rather than number of years in school), as well as linguistics and culture.

Pearson’s Policy on Accommodations for LEP Students

At Pearson, our position is that:

- a) The use of accommodations for LEP students is a decision that must be made on an individual basis;
- b) The accommodation to be used should have been properly documented in the district's LEP Plan; and
- c) The accommodation should have been used in the classroom assessment window or since the original LEP Plan was written, whichever is earlier.

Accommodations on Stanford 10 for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students

Pearson uses the accommodations taxonomy listed below, which was developed by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), University of Minnesota. We have modified the taxonomy of timing/scheduling as indicated with an asterisk.

Timing/Scheduling*	Changes to when the assessment is given
Setting/Administration	Changes to where the assessment is given
Presentation Format	Changes to how the assessment is given
Response Format	Changes to how a student responds to the assessment
Other	Use of dictionaries/word lists/glossaries

As shown in Table 3 below, students using accommodations marked under “standard administration” can receive norm-referenced scores that are considered to be valid and can be aggregated with those of other students.

Accommodations	Standard Administration	Non-standard Administration
Timing/Scheduling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaks between subtests • Time of day most beneficial to students • Frequent breaks within a subtest 	<p style="text-align: center;">x</p> <p style="text-align: center;">x</p> <p style="text-align: center;">x</p>	
Setting/Administration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test in a small group • Test individually • Environmental modifications: Location with minimal distractions, preferential seating, noise buffers 	<p style="text-align: center;">x</p> <p style="text-align: center;">x</p> <p style="text-align: center;">x</p>	
Presentation Format <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeating directions • Simplifying directions • Calculator use allowed for Mathematics Problem Solving subtest, grades 4 and up (disable device’s programming capability) • Items read aloud to student/audio (except decoding and reading comprehension) 	<p style="text-align: center;">x</p> <p style="text-align: center;">x</p> <p style="text-align: center;">x</p> <p style="text-align: center;">x</p>	
Response Format <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual aids (graph paper, templates, rulers) • Oral response in native language interpreted by school 	<p style="text-align: center;">x</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">x</p>
Other <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of dictionaries (without definitions) • Use of word lists/glossaries 	<p style="text-align: center;">x</p> <p style="text-align: center;">x</p>	

* NCEO separates Timing & Scheduling, where Pearson combines them.

Accommodations on Stanford 10 for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students

Pearson recognizes that some LEP students require the use of accommodations in order to take our assessment instruments. Often, the use of accommodations means that the test is administered under conditions different from those in place when the test was standardized. In some cases, these differences reach a level sufficient to jeopardize the validity of interpretations. However, based on available evidence, most of the accommodations listed in Table 3 are considered to be “incidental to the construct intended to be measured by the test” (AERA *Standards*, 1999, p. 101).

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Accommodations on Stanford 10 for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students

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