

FAQs on NMELPA

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE NEW MEXICO ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT (NMELPA)

By

New Mexico Public Education Department

Bureaus of Bilingual & Multicultural Education and Assessment & Evaluation

April 2006

Q1. Why are public schools required to test students for English Language Proficiency?

A1. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (1964) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in U.S. schools. Based on this Act, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) was established. One of the responsibilities of the OCR is to ensure that **all students receive equal opportunity for education**. This includes students whose home (first) language is not English (**Primary or Home Language Other than English-PHLOTE**) and students who are not yet proficient in English (**English Language Learners-ELL**).

Q2. What is the process for identifying PHLOTE or ELL students?

A2. When a student enters a school/district, the first procedure used to identify his/her language needs is the administration of the **Home Language Survey**. Parents usually complete this form at student registration. If a parent indicates that there is a language other than English spoken in the student's home environment (whether or not English is also spoken), the student is classified as a **PHLOTE student**. The next required step is to test the student with the NMELPA for his/her English language proficiency. If the student does not score Proficient ("Advanced"), then he/she is classified as an **ELL**.

In some cases, parents indicate on the Home Language Survey that the student's family speaks only English, but the student's teacher soon notices that he/she is struggling academically and wonders if English language proficiency may be a factor in the problem. In this case, the teacher should complete the **Teacher Observation Form** and submit it to the school's SAT team to recommend that the student be tested for English language proficiency. Many native New Mexican children are in this category, called "the Invisible ELL;" they know conversational English very well, but they struggle with the more demanding academic levels of English.



Currently, research has shown that the highest dropout rate in U.S. schools is that of English Language Learners who are not receiving English as a Second Language services (Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas, 2002). **Because of this need, both Federal (NCLB) and State laws (NM Bilingual Education Law) require that all students who are PHLOTE be tested initially for English language proficiency within 20 days of entering school for the first time. If the student is identified by testing with the NMELPA as an ELL, he/she must be tested annually until he/she tests Proficient.** This is so that the school/district can provide ongoing best access to education for ELL students (e.g., tutors, translators, English as a Second Language instruction, etc.). In addition, state and federal governments provide special funding for English as a Second Language instruction based upon the numbers of students identified as ELLs.

Q3. Is an ELL the same as an LEP student? What do the acronyms mean?

A3. Yes. **LEP** means “Limited English Proficient”- a middle level of English Language Learner. ELL is the preferred term for this level because “Limited English Proficient” is a classification based upon a deficit model.

Q4. What are other common acronyms in this field?

A4. Other common English language proficiency classifications are:

- **NEP** - “Not (at all) English Proficient” – a beginning level of ELL.
- **FEP** means “Fluent or Fully English Proficient” – the level at which a student is no longer classified as an ELL and no longer is required to take the NMELPA. If students have scored “FEP” on previous tests, they are not required to take the NMELPA.
- The **Home Language** of the student is not assessed on the English language proficiency assessment. The home language is assessed with a Spanish or Native American (etc.) language proficiency test, etc.

Q5. What is the difference between ESL and ELD?

A5. ESL and ELD are levels of English as a Second Language instruction:

- **ESL** is the beginning level of English language instruction (English as a Second Language) –usually provided to NEP students (“Beginning” and “Early Intermediate levels.”
- **ELD** is an advanced level of English as a Second Language instruction, aimed at students who are almost fluent (FEP) in academic English. This level of instruction is usually provided to ELL/LEP students (students scoring at the “Intermediate” and “Early Advanced” levels).
- The **home language** of the student is not assessed on the English language proficiency assessment; the home language is assessed with a Spanish or Native American (etc.) language proficiency test.



Q6. Must parents be notified that their child is scheduled to take the NMELPA?

A6. No. The school/district is not required to notify the parent when the child is scheduled to take the NMELPA.

Q7. Why is the NMELPA the test that we must use?

A7. The NMELPA has been **newly** constructed based upon the New Mexico English Language Development Content Standards. These locally-created standards provide a developmental framework for English language proficiency. NMELPA addresses both early-level and conversational-level skills (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills - BICS) as well as more advanced academic use of English (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills – CALPS). NMELPA also provides a consistent statewide report on the status of ELL students.

Q8. Are there any other tests that are approved for determining English language proficiency of students?

A8. No. Until spring 2006, New Mexico districts were allowed to choose from three English language proficiency tests (LAS, IPT or Woodcock-Munoz). These tests have identified the ELL students for 2005-2006. However, as of spring 2006, NMELPA is the only formal state-approved test for determining student English language proficiency. The three previously-approved tests may be used to screen and place newly-entering ELL students only for the remainder of School Year 2005-2006, because they can provide immediate locally-scored information for placement.

Q9. Who should take the NMELPA?

A9. All identified ELLs are required to take the NMELPA in spring 2006. This means that, in all public school districts in New Mexico, all charter schools and all BIA schools, the students who have previously been identified as ELLs must be tested annually with the NMELPA. If a student has been identified as an ELL, he/she must take the test; there are no exemptions for students who are newly arrived in the U.S. this school year, or for ELL students not participating in a Bilingual or ESL program, etc. Also, whether or not a school receives Title III or State Bilingual Education funding is irrelevant – all of the above schools must test their ELL students.

Q10. How many times must an ELL take the NMELPA?

A10. An ELL student must take the NMELPA at least once annually until he/she scores “Proficient” in all domains: Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking and Comprehension.

There is no limit on the number of years or grade levels that ELLs are eligible to receive ESL instruction or Bilingual Education. When the student scores Proficient (“Advanced”) in all domains, he/she is eligible to be reclassified as “FEP” and exited from the ESL instructional program. Students of all levels of English language proficiency may still participate in the State Bilingual Education program, which will continue to provide them with instruction in their home or heritage language; i.e., language other than English.

Q11. Should high school seniors be tested?



A11. Yes. It is important that seniors' English language proficiency status be reported not only to the Bilingual & Multicultural Education Bureau, but also to the Higher Education Commission for state planning purposes and to count for school achievement.

Q12. In the past, a PHLOTE student at the Kindergarten or Grade 1 Level who scored "Fluent" on the Oral part of the English Language Proficiency test was considered to be "Proficient." It was assumed that such a student was fluent enough in English to be placed in the "regular" classroom to learn Reading and Writing as though he/she were a native English speaker. Is this practice still to be followed with the NMELPA?

A9. Yes. Kindergarten and Grade 1 students who have previously scored "Fluent" on the Oral part of an English Language Proficiency test should not be tested with the NMELPA in spring 2006. Such a student should not be considered to be classified as an ELL unless he/she is struggling academically.

Q13. Should Special Education students be tested?

A13. Yes, to a reasonable extent. This procedure must be followed: At the local school level, students are referred by teachers to a Student Assistance Team (SAT) when the teachers identify them as having difficulties in the "regular" classroom. One option for the SAT team is to recommend the student for Special Education classification and services. If that recommendation is made, an "IEP" Team then meets to write up a plan for the student, called an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). If the student is an ELL in addition to Special Education classification, his/her IEP must include provision for ESL services and also possibly instruction in his/her home language. The student must take the NMELPA, if feasible.

If the student's exceptionality is so extreme that he/she is not able to be tested, the test administrator must record this situation by filling in Item 6 on the Student Biogrid ("Other: Non-Completion").

Q14. May a Special Education student receive accommodations on the NMELPA?

A14. Yes. For spring 2006, the only test material adapted for special-needs students that is available is the Large Print version of the test. An ELL Special Education student may be considered for accommodations that do not compromise the results of the language testing. To know which accommodations are allowed, consult Harcourt's accommodations manual: Case, *New Mexico English Language Proficiency Assessment (NMELPA) Accommodations for Students with Disabilities*, April 2006, pages 4-6.



Please remember that, for all accommodations allowed on a test:

- (a) the IEP team must have specified the accommodation on the Individualized Education Plan, and
- (b) the student must be provided with practice in using the accommodation in the classroom setting for at least 3 months before the test.

The Student Biogrid will require the test administrator to indicate the accommodations that were approved and used with the student on the test.

Q15. Are other ELLs allowed to have accommodations on this test?

A15. No language accommodations are allowed. Again, the IEP team determines a student's eligibility for accommodations.

Q16. Is the Test Administrator (TA) allowed to prompt students and clarify questions?

A16. The TA may prompt students and clarify questions during the sample items which are presented at the beginning of each section. Please refer to Case, *New Mexico English Language Proficiency Assessment (NMELPA) Accommodations for Students with Disabilities*, April 2006 that the directions cannot be translated into another language, not even with the sample items. During the actual test, the test administrator must not provide repetition, prompts or explanations that are not specified by the test forms.

Q17. How is the NMELPA administered?

A17. The Listening, Reading and Writing subtests of the NMELPA test are administered to class groups. The Speaking subtest must be administered to each student individually by the test administrator, usually in a 15-minute test period. The Comprehension score is derived from scoring the other subtests.

Q18. If a student is absent on the day of the NMELPA testis administered, must he/she be tested later during the test window?

A18. Yes, students who miss any subtest should be tested during the make-up window.

Q19. If the NMELPA Reading-Writing-Listening test administration is interrupted by some unforeseen event (such as a fire or natural disaster, etc.), what should the test administrator do?

A19. The PED Assessment Bureau's *2005-2006 Procedures Manual for the NMSBA Program and the NMHSSA Program* has a clear explanation of procedures to follow.



(You can locate this manual on the PED website: <http://ped.state.nm.us>. Go to “Programs,” then click on “Assessment and Evaluation.” On the left side, you will see a column of manual titles. Click on “*PED Procedures Manual*” link” If the test cannot be re-administered, the test administrator should mark the Student Biogrid on the item for incomplete tests. If at all possible, the test should be re-administered to these students during the test make-up window. Students must take the entire NMELPA, not just part of it. However, the student must only take the remainder of the test that was not yet taken; he/she cannot re-visit or change items previously answered. The test administrator must follow the specified requirements for scoring the Speaking subtest regarding repetition of questions.

Q20. When is the testing window for spring 2006?

A20. The testing window is April 19 to May 12, 2006.

Q21. Who can administer the NMELPA?

A21. Any school staff person who is: (a) proficient in English-all domains (Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking), and (b) **trained** on how to give the test, including how to score the Oral subtest. The TA does not have to be a certified teacher.

Please remember that there is a non-disclosure form that test administrators must sign.

Training was provided for over 800 school district staff in March 2006. For further information about the availability of training, please contact Margaret F. Delgado, Assessment Bureau, PED (Email: MargaretF.Delgado@state.nm.us).

Q22. Who will pay for the NMELPA, and how much does it cost?

A22. For spring 2006 only, PED will pay for administration of the NMELPA. This includes public school districts, BIA, charter, and Special State-supported schools. The cost this spring is \$11.50 per student; we do not expect the cost to increase for next year’s administration.

Q23. How does one order test forms, manuals, etc.?

A23. Use the Harcourt Spectrum ordering system – on their website at <http://www.harcourtspectrum.com>. May 1, 2006 is the company’s deadline for the last ordering of the NMELPA tests and manuals for spring 2006.

Q24. Should one order more test copies than the current number of students?

A24. No, ordinarily each order has an overage of 10 percent.



Q25. Should one order additional copies of the test to use next fall?

A25. No. After the Placement Test for the NMELPA is checked for bias in July 2006, it will be sent to all districts in August. This shorter, locally-scored version of the NMELPA must be used to screen, identify and place ELLs in 2006-2007. In spring 2007, a new version of NMELPA will be used to test all identified ELLs. Districts (BIA, Charter, and Special State-supported schools) will be informed of new ordering timeline for spring 2007.

Q26. Will there be Pre-ID labels, or will the test administrator need to bubble in information on the Student Biogrids?

A26. Harcourt will use its New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (NMSBA) database to produce Pre-ID labels. However, these may be incomplete or not available for all ELL students. If this is the case, the TA must bubble in correct data. The district must not create a separate set of Pre-ID labels.

Q27. When will the results of the NMELPA be sent to districts?

A27. The following steps are planned for the processing and reporting of data:

- At the end of the test window, just as was done with the NMSBA, the district test coordinator must return all copies of **all** test booklets and manuals to Harcourt. Keep all scorable materials together (see page 24 of Test Coordinator Manual).
- The results of the NMELPA will be reported to a New Mexico Standard-Setting Committee in June 2006. This committee will determine the “cut scores” for each level of student proficiency.
- Student levels based on their test scores, and this data is reported to the state, each district, school and parents/guardians. A copy of the individual student’s report must be filed in his/her cumulative student record. The report will then be available for teachers to use to plan instruction for 2006-2007. The report will include the student’s score and level of performance in the five domains: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing and Comprehension. The student’s overall proficiency level will also be reported.

Q28. How will the NMELPA scores compare with the IPT, LAS or Woodcock-Munoz scores of previous years?

A28. In 2006-2007, the New Mexico Public Education Department (Assessment and Bilingual & Multicultural Education Bureaus) will do a crosswalk study of the correlation of all 4 tests used with the New Mexico English Language Development Standards. In addition, a second study will be done comparing test scores from 2004-2005 school year with those of 2006 spring administration of the NMELPA.

Q29. Will the NMELPA score affect the school’s AYP rating?

A29. No. Neither the English language proficiency score nor the home language proficiency score will affect the school’s academic rating, which is the AYP Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).



The Annual Report to the State Legislature and the Biennial Report to United States Department of Education requires passing the annual targets in both of the Making Progress and Attaining Proficiency (AMAOs) and also Making AYP.

Q30. Must the NMELPA scores be reported by districts, etc. in the Accountability Data System (ADS) or on the Bilingual & Multicultural Education Bureau's State Annual Report (September 30)?

A30. No. The formal NMELPA test scores will be reported to the state in August.

Schools will not be required to report English language proficiency data on the September 30, 2006 Annual Report. Schools will still be required to report home language proficiency for all students in the State Bilingual Education programs on the September 30, 2006 Annual Report.



FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT:

PED WEBSITE: <http://ped.state.nm.us> Click on the link 2006 NMELPA Administration on the main web page. You will be linked to “assessment and Evaluation web page – On the left side, you will see a column of manual titles. Several of them address NMELPA questions. Also, the *2005-2006 Procedures Manual for the NMSBA Program and the NMHSSA Programs* provides general guidance on test administration requirements and accommodations. To see this manual, click on “*PED Procedures Manual.*”)

You may also contact:

Dr. Gladys Herrera-Gurulé, Bilingual & Multicultural Education Bureau
Email: gladys.herrera-gurule@state.nm.us

Dr. Kathryn Sherlock, Bilingual & Multicultural Education Bureau
Email: kathryn.sherlock@state.nm.us

Robert Romero, Bilingual & Multicultural Education Bureau
Email: robert.romero1@state.nm.us

Arlene Romero, Bilingual & Multicultural Education Bureau
Email: arlene.romero@state.nm.us

Adrian Sandoval, Bilingual & Multicultural Education Bureau
Email: adriani.sandoval@state.nm.us

And

Margaret F. Delgado, Assessment & Evaluation Bureau
Email: MargarefF.Delgado@state.nm.us

Janet S. Haas, Assessment & Evaluation Bureau
Email: JanetS.Haas@state.nm.us

