



NJTESOL/NJBE, Inc.

NJ Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/NJ Bilingual Educators



Members of the State Board of Education
New Jersey State Department of Education
100 Riverview
Trenton, NJ 08065
February 10, 2016

Dear Members of the State Board of Education:

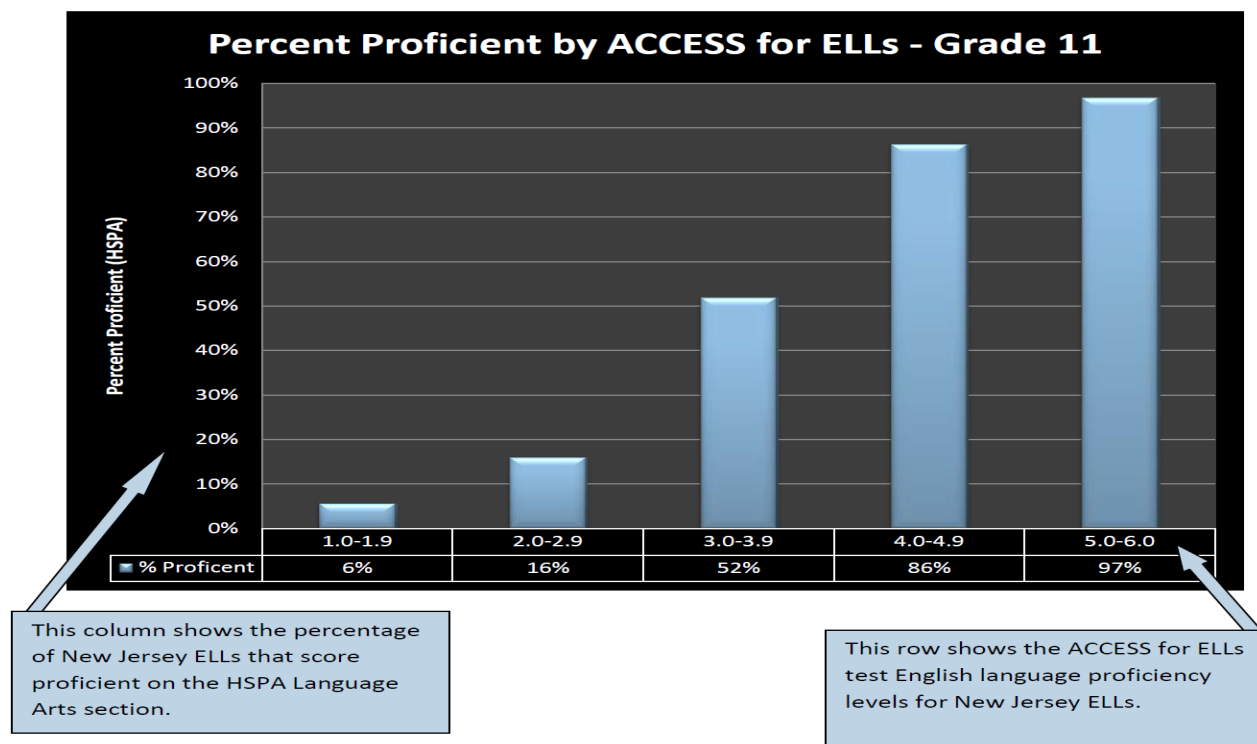
Thank you the opportunity to testify on behalf of NJTESOL/NJBE, a statewide educational organization, which represents over 1500 bilingual and English as a Second Language educators who teach over 70,000 English language learners (ELLs) in NJ.

The impending graduation requirements are of grave concern to those of us who work with 2,500+ senior ELLs. These students are most affected by these new requirements. The ELL subgroup already has the lowest graduation rate and we fear that the current guidelines will increase the number of dropouts in this vulnerable population unless the second language acquisition process is taken into consideration.

Learning a second or third language to a high academic level takes time. ELLs experienced a greater degree of success in the former process of testing in 11th grade with multiple administrations of HSPA in their senior year as well as the options offered under the Alternate High School Assessment (AHSA). The graph below clearly indicates how students at the higher proficiency levels had the greatest success on HSPA. So the more time with appropriate instruction that a child is provided, the better they will ultimately perform.

It is well-known that the majority of English speakers did not pass PARCC, therefore it is no surprise that only 9% (both current and former) of 11th grade ELLs achieved proficiency. In comparison to the previous process, the seniors who did not pass PARCC have the option of passing one of a menu of alternate assessments in order to meet the graduation requirements: SAT, PSAT, ACT, ASVAB, or Accuplacer Writer, or AP classes. However, none of these alternatives allow accommodations for ELLs which were available under AHSA. So, NJTESOL/NJBE decided to conduct a survey to discern how many of the ELLs who did not pass PARCC (91%) were able to demonstrate proficiency through any of the alternative assessments. Fifty-two districts responded representing 750 seniors. Of that sample, only 10% demonstrated proficiency through any of the alternatives, leaving the vast majority of ELLs with the portfolio

appeal process as their only vehicle to graduation. This creates a tremendous, cumbersome burden for those districts with a number of ELLs as well as time lost in valuable instruction for these students. Obviously, the addition of these alternate assessments has not been equitable or fair for this specific group.



Due to these facts, NJTESOL/NJBE is requesting that the NJ Department of Education consider allowing ELLs to take the ESL Accuplacer as an alternate assessment to demonstrate College and Career readiness. In consultation with representatives from the county colleges, we found that many ELLs typically begin their college career at the county college level for various reasons. Most importantly, many of the county colleges offer Developmental ESL classes so that ELLs can continue learning and refining their academic English. The colleges use the ES: Accuplacer as a tool for placement. The representatives from the county colleges would be able to offer an appropriate cut score based on their vast experience of working with this motivated population. Certainly, that would reduce the number of ELLs who would need to participate in the portfolio appeals process.

In looking ahead, NJTESOL/NJBE would also encourage the Department of Education to consider the English language proficiency level of students who are required to take the PARCC in grades 9 and 10, respectively. Data support the fact that the longer the ELL is in school, the more English they learn and the better they can perform on standardized tests. ELLs are already required to take an English language proficiency test (ACCESS 2.0 for ELLs) each year. By monitoring their progress on this assessment, districts can identify when students would most

likely be able to demonstrate proficiency on PARCC. Assuming the same trajectory of success based on the English proficiency level, we can estimate that students who are at ELP levels 1 and 2 would actually benefit from more instructional time rather than sitting in front of a computer and attempting to take a test in a language that they do not understand. This is apparent in this year's PARCC 9 and 10 results. It would be also be extremely useful to disaggregate the ELL subgroup by English proficiency level to clearly identify the trends and make better decisions regarding these students.

STUDENT POPULATION GROUP		VALID SCORES	PERCENT MET/EXCEEDED EXPECTATIONS	PERFORMANCE LEVEL CATEGORIES ** (in Percent)					MEDIAN SCALE SCORE	SCALE SCORE RANGE Low: 650 High:850
				Not Yet Meeting Expectations (Level 1)	Partially Meeting Expectations (Level 2)	Approaching Expectations (Level 3)	Meeting Expectations (Level 4)	Exceeding Expectations (Level 5)		
SUBGROUP	GRADE 9									
ELL	3,683	6	63	21	11	5	1	689	650 / 834	
Current ELL	3,117	4	69	19	8	4	1	686	650 / 834	
Former ELL	566	16	27	30	27	15	1	718	650 / 809	
SUBGROUP	GRADE 10									
ELL	3,007	6	67	17	9	6	1	683	650 / 830	
Current ELL	2,379	4	75	15	6	4	0	677	650 / 830	
Former ELL	628	16	38	26	20	14	2	712	650 / 830	

As a result of these concerns, NJTESOL/ NJBE urges the NJ Department of Education to seriously consider these requests to develop appropriate guidelines so that ELLs can demonstrate their proficiency and achieve the goal of high school graduation. I truly appreciate this opportunity to advocate on behalf of 2,500 senior ELLs and their parents who often do not have a voice.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth J. Franks
Advocacy Representative
NJTESOL/NJBE