

Test Accommodations Extended for Former English Language Learners

Recently, the United States Department of Education (USDE) approved New York State's (NYS) application to extend testing accommodations to former English language learners (ELLs) for two school years after becoming English proficient. The new policy, which NYSUT supported, is consistent with the USDE's rationale for monitoring students' progress for two school years after the students are no longer considered ELLs, while they meet State academic achievement standards.

The NYS Board of Regents approved this policy change effective for all NYS Testing Programs for the 2008 – 2009 school year, **beginning with the Elementary Level Examination in Social Studies administered in Grade 5 on November 12 and 13, 2008. This policy applies to ELLs who tested proficient in the 2006-2007 and the 2007-08 school years.**

What is an accommodation?

New York State, historically, has permitted testing accommodations for English language learners. An accommodation is a change in how a test is presented, in how a test is administered, or in how a test taker is allowed to respond. Accommodations generally do not substantially alter what the test measures nor do they change the academic level or performance criteria of a test. Appropriate accommodations are made in order to provide students equal opportunity to demonstrate knowledge.

Prior to the new accommodations for ELLs, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) policy stated that once ELLs showed proficiency in English based on the results of the New York State English as a Second Language Test (NYSESLAT), they were no longer entitled to receive testing accommodations, native language support, instructional services provided by ESL/bilingual specialists, and specially-designed curricula and materials. Former ELLs, especially those transitioning from free-standing ESL or bilingual education programs into classes in English experience difficulties with the academic vocabulary. Newly English proficient students at the secondary level have to navigate the complexities of departmentalization of subjects and the rigors of content specific vocabulary.

The policy change will affect ELLs by extending current testing accommodations during their first two school years as English proficient. This extension will provide former ELLs with the opportunity to demonstrate their content knowledge while developing their linguistic and academic skills. The testing accommodations will not affect the validity and reliability of the state assessments nor will they affect the content of the tests and the expected performance criteria.

The New York State Testing Accommodations for ELLs

The following testing accommodations are allowable for former ELLs for up to two school years immediately after they have achieved proficiency on the NYSESLAT:

- Time Extension (All Exams)** - Schools may extend the test time for ELLs.
- Separate Location (All Exams)** - State examinations may be administered to ELLs individually or in small groups in a separate location.
- Third Reading of Listening Selection (English Language Arts Exams Only)** - Proctors may read the listening passage on the Regents Comprehensive Examination in English and on the Grades 3-8 English Language Arts Tests a third time to ELLs.
- Bilingual Glossaries (All Exams except Foreign Language)** - ELLs may use bilingual glossaries when taking State examinations in all subjects except foreign languages. The bilingual glossaries may provide only direct translations of words. Bilingual glossaries that provide definitions or explanations are **not** permitted.
- Simultaneous Use of English and Alternative Language Editions (Not Allowed for English Language Arts & Foreign Language Examinations)** - For State examinations for which the Department provides written translations, ELLs may use both English and an alternative language edition of the test simultaneously. However, they should be instructed to record all of their responses in only one of the two editions.
- Oral Translation for Lower Incidence Languages (Not allowed for English Language Arts & Foreign Language Examinations)** - Schools may provide ELLs with an oral translation of a State examination when there is no translated edition provided by the Department. All translations must be oral, direct translations of the English editions. Written translations are not allowed. No clarifications or explanations may be provided.
- Writing Responses in the Native Language (Not allowed for English Language Arts Examinations)** - ELLs making use of alternative language editions or of oral translations of State examinations may write their responses to the open-ended questions in their native language.

Advice for Local Leaders

- Consult with your ESL teachers, bilingual teachers, and general education classroom teachers with ELLs to ensure they are aware of the new SED policy and to assess the needs of their ELLs.
- Work with the school district administration on implementation strategies to ensure that the new SED policy affecting former ELLs will be provided appropriate accommodations.

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