

# GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING WHICH ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS SHOULD BE ADMINISTERED THE SPANISH VERSION OF THE NJ ASK TEST [Updated 12-08]

## Who takes the test in Spanish?

The following guidelines summarize the three criteria that must be considered as multiple measures in the overall choice of which version of the NJ ASK 3-8 (Spanish or English) to administer to Spanish ELLs.

- **TIME IN THE UNITED STATES:** **First year students (enrollment after July 2008) should be provided the Spanish version.** Second year students (enrolled 2007-2008) can be provided the Spanish version depending on relevant circumstances (such as patterns of attendance and/or time out of the country during the school year) combined with the two criteria below,
- **ENGLISH PROFICIENCY LEVEL:** **The translated version is to be administered to native Spanish speakers who are at the ACCESS Level 1 *Entering Level*.** However, many Access Level 2 Beginning Level students should also take the Spanish version if it is likely that their overall understanding and performance will be better than taking the test in English.
- **PROGRAM OF INSTRUCTION:** **ACCESS Level 1 new arrivals have such limited English that, as a rule, they should take the test in Spanish.** The final criterion applies more to Level 2 and 3 and must be considered in the context of the previous two factors. If the program of instruction for ELL students has provided systematic access to teaching in literacy and math where Spanish is included, giving the Spanish version will promote greater understanding and improved performance.

## Who makes the decision to use the Spanish version?

A determination has to be made primarily by the Spanish bilingual teacher [who is the teacher who has had most sustained instructional interactions with the student and frequent opportunities to evaluate fluency and academic growth] as to which version of the NJASK Test truly gives his/her ELL students the best chance to understand the most test items and perform as best as possible. While the Needs Assessment Teacher, ESL and, in some cases, the general homeroom teachers all should communicate and collaborate in this decision, the bilingual teacher typically is the teacher with the most first-hand and accurate knowledge of the both student's language dominance and proficiency. Those factors which justify the administration of the Spanish version should be reported to the school test coordinator and administrators to facilitate ordering and subsequent test administration planning and scheduling.

## Why is a parallel translated version now available?

In providing Spanish versions of the test, the Department of Education is finally acknowledging and attempting to address the severe problems in test reliability and validity for any ELL being tested in English for proficiency in grade-level content areas. Even with all the "accommodations" that are provided—the truth remains that the complexity of the tasks being required are much more demanding for language learners. Essentially, "*Testing in English is really Testing of English*" which puts every ELL and every school that enrolls them at a considerable disadvantage in terms of generating accurate core content performance information for instructional planning and NCLB compliance.

It must be remembered that for immigrant students—**especially those in the grades 3-8 who have had their initial foundation of elementary level literacy and learning developed in Spanish back in their homeland schools**—it is critical to come to a fair decision as to what is really in the best interest of the child. As educators we need to take the time to put ourselves in the place of the student. We need to recognize the inherent problems in fairly testing new arrivals at all and consider which modality is most likely to reduce the stress, frustration and fear of being examined under these conditions and which is likely to generate the highest score?

## What about translated versions in other languages, exemptions and testing accommodations?

At present, the NJ DOE does not have the resources to generate parallel translated versions in other languages. **The current system of limited exemptions (*for literacy only in the first year of enrollment*) now only remains available for ELLs in languages other than Spanish.** Specified accommodations are required whenever ELLs (regardless of proficiency level) are tested in English. These accommodations provide some benefits. However, there is no definitive data that they consistently have the intended effect of making high-stakes achievement testing more valid, reliable or equitable for assessing second language learners or for generating data that is an accurate measure of the content-area knowledge of these students.

Please contact the Offices of Planning, Evaluation and Testing and Bilingual Education if further information or clarification is required.