

IEP Team Decisions for the English Language Proficiency Assessment

Michigan's English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA) is the latest component of the Michigan Educational Assessment System (MEAS) to achieve operational status. Administered for the first time in spring 2006, the purpose of the ELPA is to measure the English language proficiency levels of Michigan students who are learning English as a second language. The ELPA helps Michigan meet federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for the annual assessment of students eligible as English language learners (ELLs), and is based on the English language proficiency standards that were adopted by the State Board of Education in April 2004. As noted in the *Spring 2006 ELPA Coordinator Manual for Districts and Schools*, the "long-term goal of the ELPA is to create uniform measures that support the teachers who help these students learn English so that our students can more effectively participate in academic courses taught in English."

Eligibility for the ELPA

As outlined in the ELPA manual, all ELLs who are enrolled in grades K-12 at Michigan public schools, including charter schools, must be assessed with the ELPA each spring. This includes all ELLs who are eligible to receive services (including bilingual, English as a Second Language (ESL), and so forth), regardless of whether or not they are currently receiving them. All ELLs enrolled in private schools that receive Title III funding must also be assessed according to agreements with their local districts. Students are identified as eligible ELLs through the Home Language Survey, which is used to determine if the student's native language is not English or if a language other than English is spoken in the home. If either condition is true, then the student's English language proficiency is assessed. Students scoring below proficient are considered ELLs and are part of the pool that will take the ELPA.

ELPA and Students with Disabilities

Throughout the state there are students with disabilities who are also ELLs. Therefore, IEP Teams need to carefully consider whether students who are eligible for special education should also participate in the ELPA and, if so, what accommodations might be appropriate based on the student's individual needs. Many IEP Teams have been utilizing the *OEAA Assessment Accommodation Summary Table* that was approved by the State Board in June 2005 to make accommodations decisions for MEAP and MI-Access. The table was recently expanded to include accommodations for ELPA, and was approved by the SBE on March 14, 2006. The table is important because the ELPA assesses the four English language arts areas of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. It is necessary to address each area separately for each student participating in the ELPA, since some accommodations are standard for one section but not for another. In particular, the area of speaking has not been assessed at the state level on any prior assessment and, thus, requires careful consideration.

Appendix A of the *Spring 2006 ELPA Coordinator Manual for Districts and Schools* contains the ELPA excerpt from the *OEAA Assessment Accommodation Summary Table*. The manual also has a section dedicated to accommodations that discusses audio versions; the use of scribes, tape recorders, and Braillewriters; the rules for using word processors; and other information that can help IEP Teams make informed decisions about what accommodations are available and how to provide them to students. As is the case for MEAP and MI-Access, nonstandard accommodations change the construct being tested. Therefore, their use will result in students being counted as not assessed, which may create accountability difficulties. For example, while ELPA participation rates are not used in the calculation of NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), they are an important part of Michigan's NCLB Title III reporting requirements. The percent of students that must participate in the ELPA for Title III is the same percent that must participate for NCLB AYP calculations (a minimum of 95%) even though the percentages are used for different purposes. Michigan must, therefore, work to ensure that all ELLs are assessed each year, and while performance on the ELPA will not directly impact AYP calculations for a school or district, it is expected that as students make progress in learning English, the number of ELLs who score at the "proficient" level on MEAP and MI-Access should increase.

A few ELLs across the state have disabilities so significant that participation in the ELPA is not appropriate. IEP Teams should make this decision by ordering ELPA materials for each student in question, and reviewing them in light of the nature of the student's disability. If the student can participate on some portions of the ELPA—for example, the speaking and listening portions—the assessment should be administered. If the student's disability prevents him or her from participating on any section of the ELPA, that should be documented in the student's IEP. To help the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) account for these students, ELPA coordinators need to send to the MDE (1) the most recent Present Level of Academic and Functional Performance (PLAFP), (2) the section of the student's IEP where participation in state assessment (MEAP or MI-Access) is recorded, and (3) the student's pre-printed ELPA answer document. All documentation should be sent to Marilyn Roberts, Michigan Department of Education, Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, MI 48909.

ELPA Resources

The MDE Web site includes an ELPA Web page, which can be found at www.michigan.gov/elpa. Among other information, this site contains:

- Rubrics for scoring the speaking component of the ELPA.
- Question & Answer documents from teleconferences held in January and March 2006
- *The Spring 2006 ELPA Coordinator Manual for Districts and Schools*, which lists responsibilities for district and building coordinators and assessment

administrators; has information about how to handle assessment materials before, during, and after the assessment; contains Frequently Asked Questions, a glossary, and an Accommodations Summary Table for ELPA; and provides information about security and ethics.

- General information on state assessment of ELLs.

The archived ELPA teleconferences from January 20 and March 2, 2006, are available for viewing at www.mistreamnet.org (click on “Archived Streams” in the left-hand column, then click on the Special Education icon under “Categories”). Videotapes and DVDs of the March briefing can also be ordered from Brenda Hose at hoseb@resa.net or 734-334-1437. General comments and questions about the ELPA can be directed to the State ELPA Coordinator, Marilyn Roberts, at robertsm@michigan.gov.