

Test Translation Matters

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Test Translation Matters (TTM) is an occasional publication of Second Language Testing, Inc. (SLTI). The purpose of TTM is to inform educators, testing specialists, and the public on matters and issues concerning the translation or adaptation of standardized tests. TTM is archived on the SLTI website, www.2LTI.com, so that readers can search back numbers for information on issues of problems they are encountering. We realize that our readers' time is limited, so each number is short, dealing only with one or two specific matters in test

Parent Guides to State Assessments

President Bush's signing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 led to strong interest in state-wide standardized assessments. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandates that every state enact a state-wide assessment and accountability program that meets federal standards, including an accountability index known as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), by which states track their movement toward the federal mandate of 100% of students reaching the state-defined level of Proficient in reading or language arts and math by the year 2014. States typically comply by administering standardized assessments aligned to state content standards. Every eligible student is required to take these tests, which typically last several days. English Language Learners (ELLs) are required to take at least the mathematics assessment during their first year in American schools. NCLB leaves the decision to translate the exams and ancillary materials into students' native languages to the discretion of the states.

Communication with parents is an important requirement of NCLB. To explain the assessments to parents and guardians, states typically publish and distribute a parent guide. Guides vary greatly in content, but most provide an introduction to the assessments, the state content standards, and advice regarding what parents can do to help their children succeed. In addition, they often include information for interpreting score reports. Familiarization with the exam enables parents to prepare their student physically, psychologically, and academically for the exam and to understand the exam's results and implications.

Parents of ELLs, typically limited or non-English speakers themselves, are disadvantaged if the parent guides are not available in their native language. This in turn puts the students at a disadvantage, since they may

translation. The focus, at least initially, is test translation and adaptation in the context of K-12 state assessment programs. This issue of TTM was prepared by Charles Stansfield, LaKisha Dockett, and Catherine Pulupa of SLTI. Comments on the topic are welcome. If you do not wish to receive further issues of TTM, simply send an email to Cstansfield@2LTI.com. Anyone wishing to be added to the list should send a request to the same address.

not receive the parental guidance and assistance that the guides encourage.

Typical Content of Parent Guides

Parent guides typically begin with an introduction to the state assessments that includes a description of its purpose, implementation, and history. The guides often mention the No Child Left Behind Act and the concept of AYP. To a parent unfamiliar with the American school system or examination process, this is an essential part of understanding his or her child's education. This is especially important in the case of ELLs, as their parents may not have attended US schools and may be unacquainted with standardized testing systems.

Many states include in their parent guides a description of parental rights in the case of a school's failure to demonstrate AYP. Often this includes advice regarding school choice. The guides may also include information on resources that are available should students do poorly on the assessments.

A key section of many parent guides is a brief overview of the test's format and content. Parent guides may contain sample questions and answers for parents to review with their child as well as reviews of the exam's procedures and regulations. This often includes a review of test-taking skills, such as how to analyze and answer questions of various formats. If a parent reviews these with his or her child, the child gains a basic understanding and comfort level with the exam. The discussion of content standards helps the parents to understand what material the exam is testing and how this relates to their child's everyday schoolwork and curriculum. These sections promote active parental involvement in academic exam preparation.

Parent guides also often include practical test preparation advice. This advice ranges from ensuring a good night's sleep and a healthy breakfast before the exams to providing the child with comfortable clothes and writing utensils. Familiarity with these procedures can reassure parents and children that they are well-prepared for the exam days.

Finally, most parent guides end with a list of resources and recommendations that can help parents understand and prepare their child for the assessments. These range from school tutoring centers to parent-oriented websites to recommended contact people within the individual school or the school system.

Importance of Translated Parent Guides

The recent increases in interest in standardized testing and the requirement that ELL students be included in state assessment statistics lend importance to the translation of parent guides to other languages.

A parent's unfamiliarity with testing puts the child at a disadvantage. If parents don't know the importance of the assessments and don't get practical advice and sample or practice materials, they can't work with their children in a deliberate manner to ensure that they gain the required skills and gain familiarity with the test format. If parents are unable to interpret the score reports to find out if their child is struggling, they may not provide or seek tutoring and other interventions. If parents are unaware that their child's school is performing below the standard and unaware of their rights, they cannot take advantage of the tutoring and school choice options available to them. This could result in a disproportionate number of English language learners continuing to have below-proficient performance, which has a negative impact on the students' academic and occupational futures and puts schools, districts, and states in jeopardy of failing to meet their AYP goals and facing restructuring, staff terminations, or even the loss of federal funding.

With these possible consequences in mind and with the positive goal of seeing all students from all socio-economic, language, and ethnic backgrounds succeed, many states are contracting to produce native language versions of the parent guides in the languages needed by their state. After the guide is translated it is usually composed with the same professional layout as the English version. Once the native language versions are printed, they are distributed at schools along with the score reports for parents. Translated parent guides are also posted on the state department of education website to facilitate year-round access to the information by parents of ELLs.

Prevalence of Translated Parent Guides in the United States

Recently, SLTI staff searched the websites of all 50 states and the District of Columbia to determine how many had translated their parent guides. We found that 29 states had a translated parent guide or translated score report available on their website. Twenty-one of the 25 states with the highest percentages of ELL students (NCELA 2006) translated their parent guide.

Parent guides are translated into a considerable number of languages. Across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, the total number of languages into which guides are translated is 25. Twenty-nine states translated their guides into Spanish, 8 into Chinese, 7 into Korean, 6 into Vietnamese and Russian, 3 into Arabic, Haitian Creole, and Hmong, and 2 into French and Khmer. For the following languages, the parent guide was translated by only one state: Amharic, Armenian, Cape Verdean, Chuukese, Japanese, Laotian, Marshallese, Portuguese, Punjabi, Samoan, Somali, Tagalog, Tongan, and Visayan (Cebuano).

| State | Languages |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Hawaii | Chinese, Chuukese, Ilokano, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Marshallese, Samoan, Spanish, Tagalog, Tongan, Vietnamese, Visayan |
| Massachusetts | Arabic, Cape Verdean, Chinese (traditional), Haitian Creole, Khmer, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese |
| California | Arabic, Armenian, Chinese, Hmong, Korean, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish |
| Pennsylvania | Arabic, Chinese, Khmer, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese |
| New York | Chinese, Haitian-Creole, Korean, Russian, Spanish |
| Maryland | Chinese, French, Korean, Spanish, Vietnamese |
| District of Columbia | Spanish, French, Chinese, Vietnamese, Amharic |
| Washington | Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Korean |
| Oregon | Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese |
| Minnesota | Hmong, Spanish, Somali |
| Florida | Spanish, Haitian Creole |
| Wisconsin | Spanish, Hmong |
| Texas | Spanish |
| Illinois | Spanish |
| New Mexico | Spanish |
| Colorado | Spanish |
| Nevada | Spanish |
| North Carolina | Spanish |
| Virginia | Spanish |
| New Jersey | Spanish |
| Connecticut | Spanish |
| Kansas | Spanish |
| Idaho | Spanish |
| Arkansas | Spanish |
| Nebraska | Spanish |
| Missouri | Spanish |
| South Carolina | Spanish |
| Rhode Island | Spanish |
| Delaware | Spanish |

not translate the parent guide. Thus, there is not a strong relationship at this time between translating a parent guide and translating the state assessment. Given the growing number of ELLs in schools and the NCLB requirement that this group also show AYP, it is likely that more states will provide native language versions of the parent guide in the future. They will do so, not only because it is in the spirit of NCLB, but because it is in their interest to do enlist the involvement of parents in their child's success in school.

It is noteworthy that Hawaii ranks first in the number of languages (13) to which the Parent Guide is translated. It is followed by Massachusetts (10), California (8), Pennsylvania (7), DC (5), Maryland (5), New York (5), Washington (4), Vermont (4), Minnesota (3), Oregon (3), Florida (2), and Wisconsin (2).

Of the 29 states that translate their parent guide, only 14 provide a translated version of their state assessments for ELLs. Thus, roughly twice as many states translate their parent guide as their state assessment. Hawaii, which provides the most native-language versions of the parent guide, does not translate its state assessments. Ohio translates its assessments into seven languages but does