

Florida PTA Proposed Resolution

**Testing English Language Learners (ELLs) in their Native
Language**

Submitted by:
Florida PTA Resolutions Committee
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Testing English Language Learners (ELLs) in their Native Language

- WHEREAS, Florida's English Language Learners (ELLs) students, total over 265,000. Florida's diversity of ELLs surpasses most states in the country. Florida is ranked 3rd in ELL population, and although Spanish is the major native language of these students, the ELLs speak more than 300 different languages ^[1, 2, 3]; and
- WHEREAS, The State of Florida recognizes the importance of multilingual development through its adoption of the Seal of Biliteracy Program. This program was established in 2016 to recognize a high school graduate who has attained a high level of competency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in one or more foreign languages in addition to English ^[4]; and
- WHEREAS, The “English as the official language of the State of Florida” amendment to the Florida Constitution and similar bills presented to the U.S. Congress provide no impediment to the instruction or assessment in languages other than English ^[5, 6, 7]; and
- WHEREAS, The state of Florida’s targeted goal is to reduce by one-third the gap between ELLs and non-ELLs in both each subject area English Language Arts and Mathematics ^[3, 8, 9]; and
- WHEREAS, Due to current Florida testing requirements of ELL students and its lack of distinction between language proficiency and academic content assessment, it is difficult to distinguish how much of an ELL student’s score on any content assessment reflects lack of proficiency in English versus knowledge of the content area. As a result, this impedes the school’s ability to provide effective instruction, remediation and course placement ^[3, 8, 10]; and
- WHEREAS, Florida testing and graduation requirements unfairly impact ELL students entering Florida’s Education System in grades 9 through 12 and their ability to earn a high school diploma ^[11, 12, 13]; now, therefore, be it
- RESOLVED, that Florida PTA and its constituent associations believe that the primary purpose of any language acquisition program for limited- and non-English speaking students should be to make a successful transition into English so they may progress well in the general education program; and be it further
- RESOLVED, that Florida PTA and its constituent associations believe that the accurate assessment of each student’s English and native language and academic skills is necessary to ensure placement in the program that best meets the educational needs of that student; and be it further
- RESOLVED, that Florida PTA and its constituent associations work to educate its members, educators and legislators of the unique challenges English Language Learner students face in this mandated testing process; and be it further

RESOLVED, that Florida PTA and its constituent associations encourage the Legislature to provide calls for additional funding that would accommodate subject matter testing of all English Language Learner students in the native language.

Rationale

Florida's public school system serves over 265,000 students in its English Language Learners (ELL) programs, the 3rd largest population in the United States. Reforms to the ELL program are needed to provide better efficiency and effectiveness in placing ELL students entering our public school system and in assessing proficiency in all content areas.

Under Florida's current accountability system and high school graduation requirements, ELL standardized test results do not provide any distinction between proficiency in content areas and command of the English language and hinders educators' abilities to provide solutions to reduce the ELL-nonELL achievement gap. There are higher-stake impacts on secondary ELL students because current testing practices make it more difficult for these students to graduate with a standard high school diplomas on time, since a special diploma is not offered. In addition to the financial impact of any person not obtaining a high school diploma, this impacts the ELL student's access to post-secondary institutions, where more comprehensive English language services are available.

The Florida PTA resolves that providing testing in the native language, as appropriate, would allow ELL students better efficiencies in their educational progress in the regular education programs and assist educators in providing for appropriate educational needs, both of which are needed to ensure ELL students' reach their full potential.

Source Data

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