

Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) Proficiency Level Setting Report

During spring and summer 2008, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and Pearson implemented a process for recommending cut points for the second version of the TELPAS English language reading proficiency assessment for English language learners (ELLs). The first version, the TELPAS Reading Proficiency Tests in English (RPTE), was administered to ELLs in grades 3–12 from the spring of 2000 through the spring of 2007. The second version, referred to simply as the TELPAS reading assessment, was administered to ELLs in grades 2–12 for the first time in spring 2008.

TELPAS Reading Overview

TELPAS measures the English acquisition in listening, speaking, reading, and writing of K–12 students who are identified as limited English proficient. The new TELPAS reading assessments are developed for six grade clusters: 2, 3, 4–5, 6–7, 8–9, and 10–12. The new TELPAS reading tests are similar to RPTE except that they

- include more questions that tap the ability to read and understand English in the context of mathematics and science instruction,
- add a grade 2 test that replaces the former assessment,
- include more questions assessing the advanced high proficiency level, and
- are administered in six rather than four grade clusters, and
- are intended to be administered as an online testing program.

The TELPAS reading tests are designed to assess what ELLs can read and comprehend at four distinct stages of learning English—beginning, intermediate, advanced, and advanced high. These stages, which are referred to as proficiency levels, are defined in four sets of proficiency level descriptors. Each test is constructed with multiple-choice items that assess the characteristics and abilities associated with the four proficiency levels. As required by the No Child Left Behind Act, TELPAS results are used in federal Annual Measurable Achievement Objective (AMAO) indicators to hold districts accountable for increasing the rate at which ELLs become proficient in the English language.

In spring 2008 the TELPAS reading assessments were taken by more than two-thirds of the students online and by the remainder on paper. In spring 2009 and beyond, the tests are expected to be administered exclusively online. Only in rare instances, such as when a student needs a testing accommodation that is not available in an online administration or when there is an unavoidable technological problem, will districts be authorized to give a student the TELPAS reading test on paper.

Process for Establishing the Proficiency Level Cut Points

The proficiency level cut points are designed to classify each ELL into one of four proficiency levels—beginning, intermediate, advanced, and advanced high. The process for recommending cut points involved two sets of committees. The first committee was an internal committee of staff members from TEA and test contractors with expertise in second language acquisition in reading, item development, and psychometrics. The second committee had experience in reviewing RPTE and TELPAS reading field-test items and in using RPTE test results to guide instruction.

The plan for transitioning the proficiency level cut points from the former RPTE tests to the new assessments was reviewed by national experts in second language acquisition and the Texas Technical Advisory Committee, which is composed of national experts in educational testing and psychometrics. The plan set forth a process for locating the cut points that best classify students in accordance with the proficiency level descriptors that underlie the test. The process included two phases:

Phase 1. From June to August 2008, an internal work group reviewed student performance on each spring 2008 test question, the pattern of student performance, and impact data associated with identified cut points. The group consisted of approximately 12 staff members from TEA, Questar Assessment, and Pearson. The work group had expertise in second language acquisition in reading and item development. The group also had expertise in RPTE and TAKS reading test development and psychometrics. After a series of eight meetings, the group identified a range, or neighborhood, of potential raw score cut points for each grade cluster assessment.

Phase 2. On August 6–7, 2008, TEA convened an external review group of 21 state educators who had experience reviewing RPTE and TELPAS reading field-test items and using RPTE test results to guide instruction. After reviewing the process followed by the internal work group, the external committee reviewed

- the ranges of potential cut points from Phase I,
- the test forms on which the cut points were based,
- the student response patterns on the four mini-tests that make up each assessment, and
- impact data.

The external committee was in agreement with the identified cut-point ranges. Following their analyses of the proficiency level descriptors, the test questions, the student response patterns, and the impact data for the various sets of potential cuts, the committee recommended one set of cut points for each grade/grade cluster assessment.

According to Texas Education Code §39.027, the commissioner of education is responsible for developing an assessment system to evaluate the progress of ELLs in reading proficiency in English and is responsible for establishing the proficiency level cut points on this assessment. The cut points, which were approved by Commissioner of Education Robert Scott based on the external advisory group's recommendations, are shown in the table below:

Table 1. Recommended Raw and Scale Score Cut Points for the TELPAS Reading Assessment

| TELPAS Reading Assessment | Raw Score Cut Points | Total Number of Questions on Test | Beginning Level | Intermediate Level | Advanced Level | Advanced High Level |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Grade 2 | 19, 30, 39 | 48 | 0-550 | 551-614 | 615-669 | 670+ |
| Grade 3 | 25, 36, 46 | 58 | 0-596 | 597-647 | 648-698 | 699+ |
| Grades 4-5 | 25, 37, 47 | 61 | 0-609 | 610-667 | 668-717 | 718+ |
| Grades 6-7 | 26, 39, 50 | 63 | 0-612 | 613-673 | 674-730 | 731+ |
| Grades 8-9 | 26, 37, 49 | 63 | 0-632 | 633-680 | 681-737 | 738+ |
| Grades 10-12 | 26, 39, 50 | 64 | 0-643 | 644-703 | 704-756 | 757+ |

Rationale for the Recommended Cuts

The cut points

- were recommended using a process that was reviewed and approved by the Texas Technical Advisory Committee and national experts in second language acquisition;
- were recommended by panelists as those that best match the students' proficiency levels on the assessment to the definitions in the proficiency level descriptors;
- produce item-level statistics that support the content validity evidence of the proficiency level tests that make up the assessment;
- result in a reasonable set of increasing expectations for students in each proficiency level over grade clusters 2–12 on the vertical scale (see below);
- result in percents of students in reading proficiency levels that are reasonable given the percents of students classified by TELPAS in the listening, speaking, and writing proficiency levels (see Table 2 below);
- result in percents of students in reading proficiency levels that are reasonable compared with percents of students in reading proficiency levels (under RPTE) in past years; and
- led 100% of attendees who completed the standard-setting evaluation form to record that they were very satisfied with the final recommended cut points for all grade clusters and proficiency levels.

Data Supporting the Recommended Cut Points

The recommended cut points on the TELPAS reading vertical scale are shown in Figure 1 on the following page. The figure illustrates expectations for students in each proficiency level over the grades/grade clusters. Statewide impact data for the final recommended cut points are presented in Table 2 on page 5. Impact data were calculated using data from the spring 2008 TELPAS operational assessment.

TELPAS Reading Vertical Scale Trends with the Final Cuts

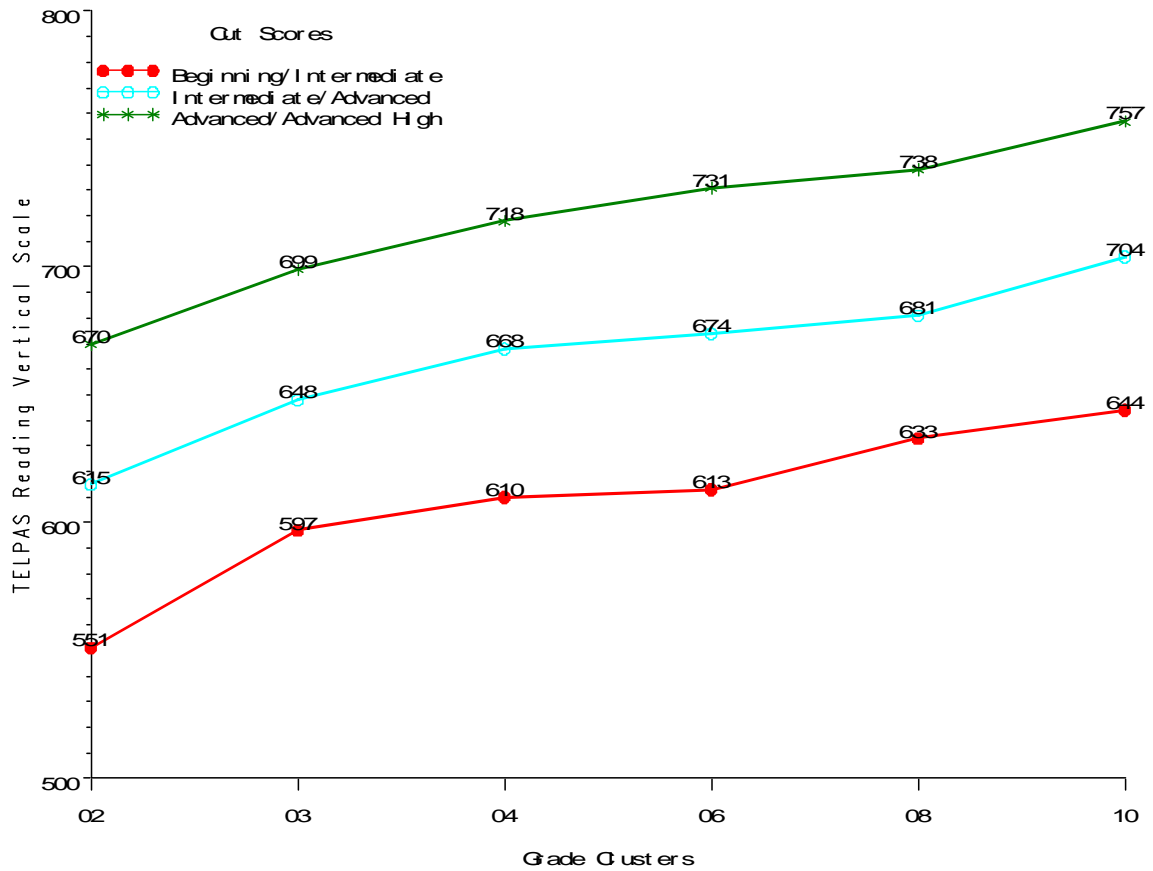


Figure 1. TELPAS reading student level proficiency level cut score trends on TELPAS reading vertical scale.

