

## English Language Proficiency Assessment in the Pacific Region

By Don Burger, EdD; Rodrigo Mauricio; and Jennifer Ryan

Using various approaches to identify English language learners, several Pacific Region jurisdictions are developing English language proficiency standards and assessments aligned with those standards. Others are working on content standards, including language arts, and have expressed interest in developing English language proficiency standards but lack formal assessment mechanisms.

Title I of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* requires that all students in a school, including English language learners, take the same state academic assessments in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science beginning with school year 2007/08. This mandate is of special concern to the Regional Educational Laboratory for the Pacific Region (REL-P), because all jurisdictions within its service region have large numbers of English language learners or limited English proficiency students in their school systems. Although English is used as a language of instruction in schools across the region, each jurisdiction has an official language or languages other than English. Children often do not receive sustained exposure to English until they begin formal schooling.

To find out about the current status of English language proficiency standards and assessment across the Pacific Region, REL-P surveyed each jurisdiction, gathering information about the existence and implementation of standards and assessments and future plans for them. The results provide an opportunity to share information across jurisdictions about approaches to English language proficiency standards and assessment and provide insights into critical needs in the region that can be used to guide future program activities.

To identify English language learners, four jurisdictions (American Samoa, Guam, Hawai'i, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands) use home-language surveys. Some also use commercially available tests and ethnicity data. The freely associated states (Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Republic of Palau), where English is not the dominant language, do not categorize English language learners as a separate population subgroup and so have no formal processes to identify them.

The Pacific region jurisdictions are continuing to develop their educational accountability systems, including English language proficiency standards and aligned assessments. Hawai'i is awaiting approval of its English language proficiency standards. American Samoa, Guam, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are preparing their standards. The freely associated states have completed or are working on content standards, including language arts, and have expressed interest in developing English language proficiency standards.

American Samoa, Guam, Hawai'i, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands have used or are using commercially developed, off-the-shelf tests to assess English language proficiency. The other jurisdictions do not have formal assessment mechanisms. The commercially developed assessments have not been contextualized to the Pacific region or aligned with local standards. In most jurisdictions the cost of testing more than 80% of the students makes using these assessments impossible. The U.S. Department of Education has awarded the Hawai'i Department of Education, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning, and a consortium of the American Samoa Department of Education, the Guam Public School System, and the Commonwealth of the

Northern Mariana Islands Public School System an Enhanced Assessment Grant that enables them to test and develop culturally appropriate English language proficiency assessments aligned with English language proficiency standards for each education agency.

This process of developing English language proficiency standards and assessments could be greatly facilitated through collaboration among jurisdictions, support from the U.S. Department of Education, provision of Pacific Resources for Education and Learning services, and additional research.

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