

**RITELL Statement for Senate Committee on Education Hearing on Senate Bills 2059, 2185 and 2135
March 26, 2014**

Rhode Island Teachers of English Language Learners (RITELL) wholeheartedly endorses Senate Bill 2185, which states that no state assessment or standardized test shall be used to determine a student's eligibility to graduate high school. We do so due to the documented harmful effects on ELLs as shown by NECAP test results published in February (see below). If high stakes assessment cannot be banned, then RITELL supports Senate Bill 2059 which imposes a 5-year moratorium on statewide assessment as a graduation requirement while state policies undergo further study as to the detrimental impact on particular populations of students such as English Language Learners. We also support Senate Bill 2135 to establish a commission to review curriculum and tests (PARCC) for the Common Core State Standards.

**Professional Associations Position Statements
Against the Use of High Stakes Testing for ELLs:**

Test users should not rely solely on test-score information in making promotion and graduation decisions (National Research Council (NRC), 1999; American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999; AERA, 2000). Instead, as colleges do, states and school districts should look at multiple measures of student achievement and readiness, and allow high achievement on one measure to balance lower performance on another.

As the NRC study (1999: 281) notes, "[h]igh-stakes testing programs should routinely include a well-designed evaluation component.

Policymakers should monitor both the intended and unintended consequences of high stakes assessments on all students and on significant subgroups of students, including minorities, English-language learners, and students with disabilities."

TESOL (2003) Inasmuch as these tests measure content in combination with linguistic abilities, **English language learners are at a distinct disadvantage that is difficult to accommodate.** Further, cultural differences and limitations concerning opportunity to learn can lead to unfair interpretations of low test scores and assessment discrimination.

...English language learners cannot demonstrate their mastery of content without having already attained a high degree of English fluency. Many English language learners come to this country with significant content knowledge; however, they often cannot express this knowledge because they lack academic proficiency in English (LaCelle-Peterson & Rivera, 1994)

...Since high English proficiency is a prerequisite for success on high-stakes tests, such assessments are not appropriate for English language learners and often do more harm than good.

Effects on ELLs/Recommendations for Assessment of ELLs

Facts and Figures Showing the Impact of NECAP testing on ELLs and Their Teachers:

- There are close to 9,000 ELLs in RI schools (8,885 according to RI Kids Count *2013 Factbook*). This does not include students who qualified as ELLs whose parents waived them from ELL services.
- Based on recently released NECAP results, the highest percentage of students in danger of not graduating belongs to the group known as English Language Learners. Fully 61% of seniors who are in the process of learning English are in danger of not graduating. (ProJo, Feb. 11, 2014)
- Causing students to sit for tests that are administered in English after they have been in the country as little as a month, as is done in the case of the Mathematics NECAP assessment, is punishing to ELLs and their teachers. The students cannot read or understand the tests and teachers must administer them anyway, causing emotional distress to both parties. When students are at the *Entering, Emerging and Developing* proficiency levels as measured by the WIDA ACCESS test, they cannot read and interpret the questions sufficiently to demonstrate their mathematical abilities, nor can they do well on English Language Arts assessments administered after 11 months in the country. It is equivalent to asking English-speaking children to take tests in Japanese in these same timeframes; they might know the content, but would not be able to understand the test questions in order to respond appropriately.
- To take and retake the same test, administered in English, does not improve the situation for ELLs, particularly in short time frames such as is suggested by RIDE policies. (*see Commissioner's February 2013 letter regarding graduation in which it states that those not meeting standards in October can take it the following*

<p>When ELLs take standardized tests, the results tend to reflect their English language proficiency and may not accurately assess their content knowledge or skills (Menken, 2000), therefore weakening the test’s validity for them. If ELLs are not able to demonstrate their knowledge due to the linguistic difficulty of a test, the test results will not be a valid reflection of what the students know and can do. (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2002)</p>	<p><i>spring</i>). The requisite proficiency cannot grow that quickly for students who have just begun to learn English. It could also lead to instructional practices focused on “doing better on the test” or “teaching to the test”, rather than the provision of high quality instruction.</p>
<p>American Educational Research Association recommends that “unless a primary purpose of a test is to evaluate language proficiency, it should NOT be used with students who cannot understand the language of the test” (AERA, 2000)</p>	
<p>Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (AERA, American Psychological Association and National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999) state that “Test use with individuals who have not sufficiently acquired the language of the test.....is in part a measure of their language skills”</p>	
<p>RITELL Recommendations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stop the use of high stakes testing as a condition for graduation. 2. Use multiple measures (teacher judgment, curriculum-based assessments, grades in sheltered ESL content classes) to judge student competence, with least weight going to results from standardized tests conducted in English, 3. Test ELLs with age-appropriate literacy in their native languages for high incidence languages (Spanish, Portuguese). Do not test students in those languages if they are not literate in their native languages. 4. Administer Plain English forms of the test to all other ELLs. Honor the guidance of experts on the testing of ELLs, including—use of plain language, use of plain format, use of simple visuals (Kopriva, 2000) <i>ELL Test Accessibility Framework</i>; see also Abedi (2004) 5. Consider proficiency when determining who can reliably take measures administered in English (perhaps only using results for students who score at Bridging and Reaching on the WIDA ACCESS Language Proficiency Test). 	

Sources:

High-Stakes Testing: Opportunities and Risks for Students of Color, English-Language Learners, and Students with Disabilities, Jay P. Heubert, J.D., Ed.D., Teachers College, Columbia University Columbia Law School

Position paper on High-Stakes Testing for K-12 English-Language Learners in the United States. (2003) Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Alexandria, VA

ERIC Digest (2002). *English language Learners and High-Stakes Tests: An Overview of the Issues*, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, DC.

Solorzano, R. W. (2008). High Stakes Testing: Issues, Implications and Remedies. *Review of Educational Research*, 78, (2), 260-329.

See also NY State Professors against High Stakes Testing: <http://www.change.org/petitions/new-york-state-regents-end-the-reliance-on-high-stakes-standardized-testing>