



NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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Position Statement on the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) and its Impact on Teachers Serving ELLs/Bilingual Learners

The main goal of the New York State Association for Bilingual Education (NYSABE) is to ensure equitable and meaningful educational opportunities for English language learners (ELLs)/bilingual learners by strengthening the professional skills of the educational communities and promoting their significant participation in the decision-making process and policy implementation in New York State. To this end, NYSABE has been joined by the New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (NYS TESOL), the Association of Dominican American Supervisors and Administrators (ADASA), and Internationals Network for Public Schools, to discuss wide-ranging concerns in relation to the impact of the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) on teachers serving ELLs/bilingual learners.

After a thorough discussion of our concerns, NYSABE presents this position statement that focuses on the two major components of the APPR: (1) Student Performance and (2) Classroom Observations.

RATIONALE

Student Performance

The practice of using state test scores attained by ELLs/bilingual learners for the purpose of teacher evaluation is neither valid nor reliable, and would unfairly target teachers of these students. ELLs/bilingual learners are unrealistically expected to perform to the level of their English monolingual peers, with whom their scores are compared, on these exams. Language proficiency affects test performance, such that ELLs/bilingual learners underperform in comparison with their monolingual peers on tests of academic content across all subject areas (Abedi & Dietal, 2004; Menken, 2008, 2010). For instance, in 2014 only 2.6% of New York's ELLs/bilingual learners in grades 3-8 scored at or above the proficiency level on the state's English language arts exam and only 11% did so on the math exam (as compared to 31% and 36% for all students respectively).

The lower test scores of ELLs/bilingual learners do not mean that teachers are failing to educate these students, but rather it is simply an affirmation of the fact that ELLs/bilingual learners are in the process of learning English. It also highlights how no state in the USA has been able to develop tests that are truly able to divorce language from content. Yet, test failure comes at a high cost for ELLs/bilingual learners and the teachers who serve them when high-stakes decisions are attached to their test scores. These students, in New York and elsewhere across the U.S., experience higher grade retention rates, higher dropout rates, and lower graduation rates. They are far more likely to attend schools which are targeted for punitive measures, such as restructuring or closure under current accountability mandates (Abedi & Dietal, 2004; Government Accountability Office, 2006; Menken, 2010, 2013). Accordingly, many researchers have drawn into question the validity of using results from these state exams to

determine high-stakes decisions for ELLs/bilingual learners and their teachers (see Solórzano, 2008 for a review).

Classroom Observations

The evaluation of teachers of ELLs/bilingual learners demands evaluators with the expertise necessary to do so. Rather than relying on outside evaluators, we maintain that this expertise should be cultivated among school leaders.

Principals and other school and district administrators in New York are not required to receive preparation about the education of ELLs/bilingual learners in order to obtain state licensure. In addition, principal and school administrator preparation programs have generally failed to provide adequate content knowledge and practicum experiences for school leaders to oversee the instruction of these students (Farkas et al., 2003; Hale & Moorman, 2003).

Introducing outside evaluators to assess the effectiveness of a teacher violates principles we adhere to with regards to classroom observation. Effective evaluation for teachers does not occur outside the context of ongoing supervision and support for professional growth. Considering the widespread need to develop and implement effective practices for ELLs/bilingual learners, we advocate for classroom observations that are conducted by school leaders familiar with the work of the teacher and the nature of the needs in his or her student population. In the case of teachers working with multilingual students, for example, many schools and educational communities struggle to articulate the right conditions for a classroom observation: can a teacher be observed using more than one language in a lesson? What is the acceptable use of a student's home language in a lesson? These and other questions with regards to language are fundamental elements of a classroom observation for which a teacher may be rated very differently by different evaluators when they have limited understanding of the best approaches to teaching ELLs/bilingual learners and no knowledge of the school's bilingual practices. Rather than subject teachers to evaluations in the "eye of the beholder," we advocate for dedicating available energy, resources, and time to building capacity among school leaders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to address our concerns about (1) the appropriateness, reliability and validity of standardized tests to assess ELLs/bilingual learners' student performance and growth, and (2) their usefulness in measuring student growth as part of the teacher evaluation, we recommend the following:

- To disaggregate APPR ratings in order to track the impact of the teacher evaluation system on teachers of ELLs/bilingual learners and determine if these teachers have received disproportionately low ratings due to flaws in the APPR system;
- To ensure that every district has a meaningful locally determined appeals process in place to correct any APPR rating that has been negatively affected by the factors described above; and
- To encourage and facilitate the use of portfolio assessments and performance-based assessments, and factor these into student performance metrics for schools implementing them.

In order to ensure that teachers of ELLs/bilingual learners are fairly and accurately evaluated through classroom observations in ways that promote their professional growth as well as the progress of their students, we recommend the following:

- To build the capacity of school-based leaders so they can supervise and evaluate teachers of ELLs/bilingual learners within a context of ongoing systematic supervision and support for professional growth;
- To dedicate available resources, energy, time, and a clear focus to building capacity among current and future school leaders;
- To regulate the use of outside evaluators. If these evaluators are required, limit their assessments' weight value to no more than 10% of the observation component of the APPR, with the exact percentage to be determined locally;
- To ensure that outside evaluators of teachers of ELLs/bilingual learners have demonstrated expertise in ELL best instructional practices; and
- To ensure that outside evaluators are knowledgeable of the particular research/evidence-based approaches used in the school where they are evaluating teachers of ELLs/bilingual learners.

On behalf of the students, families, educators, members of community-based and private entities whom NYSABE represents, we thank the members of the New York State Board of Regents and the New York State Education Department for this opportunity to express our concerns and recommendations on the Annual Professional Performance Report (APPR).

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tatyana Kleyn". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a faint, light blue rectangular stamp.

Tatyana Kleyn, Ed.D.
NYSABE President
June 2015