

Testing ESOL Students

Promising Practices 27

Program Puzzler

Standardized tests can provide valuable diagnostic information to guide instruction. In addition, all Aspire (Adult Basic and Literacy Education) programs are required to administer a standardized assessment to pretest and posttest students for accountability. There are a variety of assessments available, but how do you know which one to select? What are the tests that are approved for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students?

Peer Perspective

Tests Approved by the Ohio Board of Regents

The Aspire Program at the Ohio Board of Regents has approved the following standardized tests for pretesting and posttesting Aspire ESOL students in Ohio:

- BEST (Basic English Skills Test)
 - o BEST Plus, which assesses listening and speaking skills
 - o BEST Literacy, which assesses reading and writing skills at National Reporting System (NRS) levels 1-5 only
- CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems)
 - o CASAS Life and Work Reading and Reading for Citizenship assess reading skills
 - o CASAS Listening assesses listening skills

Timely Tips

Create an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) with your student. Allow time during orientation or class to have student-teacher conferences and complete goal-setting forms together. Then, plan to assess the student after you and the student are comfortable with his or her goals.

The TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) 9/10 test is not an ESOL test and therefore is not part of the allowed list.

Training Needed for Tests

BEST Plus requires training for each test administrator. CASAS requires one person per program to attend training. There is no formal training for the BEST Literacy test. There is a BEST Literacy Test Manual that test administrators should review prior to administering tests.

Base Your Choice on the Student's Goals

Determining which standardized test to administer to your students should be based on the student's goals. Conducting goal-setting with your student can unravel any myths about the student and his or her educational and cultural background, personal history, and reasons for attending class.

For example, students who have lived in the United States for a while and have good command of the spoken language may not be able to read or write in English. Therefore, their goals would reflect improving reading and writing skills. An appropriate test for this type of student would be BEST Literacy.

Students with goals of improving all skill areas—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—need multiple assessments to place them at appropriate levels of instruction and to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses.

Tests for Other ESOL Purposes

Other students may have advanced ESOL skills but still need ESOL services. The CASAS test is a good choice for this population as the test scale scores span NRS levels for ESOL through ABE/ASE (Adult Basic Education/Adult Secondary Education). Therefore, a student could begin in an ESOL class and smoothly transition into ABE/ASE classes without having to be retested. The student's progress would simply be tracked using CASAS no matter the students' NRS level.

Added Insights

Goal-Setting Forms and Lesson Plans for ESOL and ABE Students

Available from the Ohio Aspire website at

<http://www.ohioaspire.org/files/ESOL%20Goal%20Setting%20Packet.pdf>

English as a Second Language Orientation Booklet

Available from the Ohio Aspire website at

http://www.ohioaspire.org/files/Orientation_Booklet.doc