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NEW STATEWIDE TEST FOR LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS BEGINS

BOISE -- More than 20,000 Idaho students will take a new Idaho English Language Assessment (IELA) beginning in March.

The new statewide test will determine students' proficiency in the English language. The test is only for English language learners who are specifically placed in a Limited English Proficiency program. Idaho is home to more than 20,000 students designated as Limited English Proficient (LEP.)

"The IELA will enable the State to comprehensively and accurately track LEP student growth across Idaho, as well as within individual districts, in order to ensure that all LEP students are being properly served," said Wendy St. Mitchell, LEP Program Manager for the State Board of Education.

Under "No Child Left Behind (NCLB,)" school districts are required to test their LEP students with an annual English language proficiency test, in addition to the state content assessment like the Idaho Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT.) This test does not replace the ISAT for LEP students, because IELA assesses language proficiency rather than academic content knowledge. Unlike the ISAT, which is taken by computer, the new IELA will be given using pencil and paper.

The Limited English Proficiency Program, managed by the Board of Education, has been working with the Idaho school districts since last fall to have a statewide testing system in place by spring 2006. The Idaho English Language Assessment (IELA) work began with a U.S. Department of Education grant to fund groups of states to develop new language proficiency tests for LEP students. The grants were awarded because the U.S. Department of Education emphasized that the "off the shelf tests" used to assess LEP students were outdated and not aligned with state standards.

The IELA will enable the school districts and the state to better understand the language development needs of individual students, in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, writing and comprehension. With a better grasp on proficiency levels within each area, educators in Idaho will be better equipped to serve the students according to their specific needs. Testing will begin March 1 and continue to April 14.