

# Implementation of Language Testing with the AAPPL for the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) Application at Roma Independent School District

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## Case Study

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## Summary

This case study examines the details of the process to implement the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) as a tool to measure student growth as part of the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) application by the Roma Independent School District (ISD). The case study also presents district outcomes on the AAPPL.

The TIA is a Texas-based program that aims to reward outstanding teachers and improve student outcomes. Teachers who meet any of the

designations of Recognized, Exemplary, or Master are rewarded with a monetary incentive. Roma ISD administrators showed leadership in recognizing that measuring student growth in languages can enhance the student experience. For world languages, the AAPPL was identified as the most appropriate way to measure student growth.

**Challenge:** Roma ISD needed to identify and implement a valid and reliable assessment based on ACTFL standards to measure student growth in

world languages to meet the requirements of the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) application and to integrate AAPPL outcomes into their district framework.

**Solution:** The ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL).

## Outcomes:

- Effectively measure student growth with an official ACTFL test.
- Meet the criteria for TIA application.
- Better tailor instruction to individual student needs.
- Use results to support improved language proficiency outcomes.



## Introduction

The Roma Independent School District (ISD) is an A-Rated Academic Texas Education Agency district, located on the Texas-Mexico border in the heart of Starr County, TX. With over 6,000 students across 11 campuses, the Roma ISD is a leading provider of Pre-K to 12th grade education, including a center for adult students with disabilities. About 1,300 students participate in world language instruction in Spanish from 8th-12th grade.

## Identifying the Need: Assessment Solution to Measure Student Growth

In 2022, Roma ISD applied for the Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) for several subjects, including the Spanish language program. To demonstrate student growth, the district needed a valid, reliable, and ACTFL standards-aligned language assessment to demonstrate student growth in Spanish as outlined in the TIA application requirements.

### Overview of the Teacher Incentive Allotment

TIA, established by Texas state law in 2019, provides districts with systems and funding to recognize outstanding teachers. As described at [tiatexas.org](http://tiatexas.org), “The Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) elevates

the education profession by providing districts with systems and funding to recruit promising new teachers, retain their best teachers, and incentivize teachers to work in high-needs schools and difficult to staff positions. Based in the Texas Education Code (TEC), §21.3521 (Local Optional Teacher Designation System) and §48.112 (Teacher Incentive Allotment), TIA is built to provide lasting funds for outstanding Texas teachers to remain in the classroom and improve student outcomes.”

Teachers may be awarded one of three designations: Recognized, Exemplary, or Master. TIA designations for teachers are based on teacher observations and student growth.

**Teacher Observations:** Districts establish designation criteria based on teacher performance data, including data gathered through classroom observations of a minimum of 45 minutes. Utilizing approved appraisal rubrics ensures valid and reliable data for fair evaluations, and calibration protocols ensure scoring accuracy and consistency across subjects and schools. Additionally, districts must report appraisal data to validate teacher performance and maintain accountability. The approved data validation tools can be found at <https://tiatexas.org/for-districts/components-of-a-system/teacher-observation/>.

**Student Growth:** TIA has shifted from previous incentive programs to focus now on student growth rather than achievement data. This approach allows districts to identify effective teachers via various measures including Student Learning Objectives, Portfolios, Pre-Tests and Post-Tests, and Value-Added Models. Performance standards for each designation level are aligned with teacher effectiveness based on individual student growth targets, promoting equitable access to designation regardless of student demographics. Districts may choose any of the four TIA recognized student growth measures or a combination thereof for each eligible teaching assignment. (See <https://tiatexas.org/for-districts/components-of-a-system/student-growth/> for more details.)

Along with the TIA monetary incentive to recognize exemplary and master teachers, Roma ISD saw an opportunity to bring in the instructional focus to academic student growth among their professional learning communities or school campuses. Rodrigo Bazán, Roma ISD 504 Compliance and Assessment Director, said, **“TIA has brought about extremely important conversations to the table regarding instructional planning and implementation to all levels of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This has resulted in all our teachers being better intentioned in meeting the individual instructional needs of all students.”**

## Solution: The ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL)

Roma ISD decided to pre-test and post-test student language to measure growth in Spanish. TIA requirements state: “Pre-tests and post-tests involve the administration of a beginning of year (BOY) pre-test, administered within the first 9 weeks of the school year, and an end of year (EOY) post-test, administered during the last 12 weeks of the school year, both of which are aligned to

the standards of the course.” Per TIA requirements, testing instruments must be based on approved state or national standards, which for world language programs include *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* and *The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*.

For the pre- and post-assessments, Roma ISD selected the AAPPL.

## An Official ACTFL Assessment

Roma ISD selected the AAPPL, because it is a proficiency and performance assessment based on ACTFL standards and the only official ACTFL test for learners in grades 3-12 that can issue scores aligned with the ACTFL proficiency scale. Because the AAPPL assesses all four language skills (speaking, reading, writing, listening) in all three communicative modes (interpersonal, presentational, interpretive), it was a clear choice for the district. By using the score reports that show individual, school, district, and national averages, the AAPPL allows instructors and administrators to identify benchmarks and appropriate growth based on the levels attained at the beginning and end of specific learning

sequences. Teachers can use the score reports and the specific learning strategies suggested for each mode and score level to develop individual goals for students as well as goals for the whole class or level.

## Ease of implementation

Roma ISD didn't just want an official ACTFL test that met all the TIA requirements; the district also wanted an affordable, flexible assessment that would be easy to implement. Roma ISD also wanted a dedicated support team that would help administrators, students, and teachers facilitate a successful testing experience.

*I can't say it enough. From the onset, we've always had the technical support necessary to implement the AAPPL in every step of the way. Secondly, AAPPL is fairly priced when compared to other 3rd party vendors in the market, and what it has to offer in assessing language proficiency related to public education in Texas and in the United States is unmatched to other companies.*

*—Rodrigo Bazán,  
Roma ISD 504 Compliance and Assessment Director*

## TELPAS

Roma ISD administration also selected the AAPPL due to its alignment with the four testing domains for TELPAS (Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System) which is used statewide to assess annual student progress in learning the English language by the emergent bilingual students.

## Test Scores-to-Grade Conversion

The last step was to convert AAPPL scores to number and letter grades to customize the grading schema to fit the district's needs. Language Testing International activated the Grade-u-lator tool within the Client Site for the Roma administrators. Grade-u-lator is a tool that allows the conversion of AAPPL scores to numbers and letter grades.

# Implementation of the AAPPL for the TIA

The AAPPL was implemented in Roma ISD for the first time in 2022. The implementation required regular communication between the district network administrator, district testing director, each respective TTESS appraiser/administrator for each teacher, Spanish teachers, and the AAPPL support team at LTI. The support team provided extensive training on how to order the tests, navigate the admin site, ensure the proper testing set up, and interpret score reports.

During the first year of implementation, two middle school 8th grade Spanish teachers and eight high school 9th-12th grade Spanish teachers (a total of 10 teachers) administered the AAPPL to a total of 1,352 students.

In the middle school setting, 8th grade Spanish is a one-semester course, with groups of students taking Spanish either in the fall or in the spring. Roma ISD

pre- and post- tests each group at the beginning and end of each semester. Since High school Spanish courses are yearlong courses, Roma ISD pre-tests at the beginning of the school year and post-tests at the end of the school year.

At the district's discretion and specified on the approved TIA application, student growth measures with the AAPPL account for 50% of a teacher's overall calculation score. The other 50% is a combined score from two annual classroom observations for each teacher using the T-TESS (Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System). Roma ISD hires a third-party data management platform, TEEMS (Texas Educator Excellence Management System), which manages uploads of the pre- and post- assessment scores and the teacher observation documentation.

*“Excellent technical support, customer service, and online resources. The LTI team has always been readily available when it comes to providing virtual trainings to our teachers, especially when it comes to getting them started.”*

*—Rodrigo Bazán*

## The Impact of Assessing with the AAPPL

Implementing the pre- and post-testing with the AAPPL enabled Roma ISD to demonstrate they could effectively measure student growth as required for the TIA designation. Implementing the AAPPL has also had a positive impact on the Spanish language program at Roma ISD. The robust reporting tools and score reports allow the Spanish teachers to use AAPPL data to better meet the individual

needs of their students. Teachers can focus on students' strengths and weaknesses and set goals for each student to make progress and grow in language proficiency. Additionally, the integration of the AAPPL into the district framework facilitates professional discussions on curriculum alignment and instructional planning.

“Aside from student grades in class, having and using AAPPL data to assess their student growth in Spanish language proficiency is a first for our Spanish teachers. They now focus their professional discussions on how to better align Spanish instruction to world standards and helping their students become proficient Spanish listeners, readers, and writers anywhere in countries with Spanish-speaking populations.”

—Rodrigo Bazán



## Conclusion

Roma ISD’s successful integration of AAPPL into their framework exemplifies their commitment to enhancing education and improving student outcomes. By incorporating the AAPPL into their framework, Roma ISD was able to not only successfully apply for a TIA designation but also foster a culture of data-driven instruction and continuous improvement within their Spanish language programs.

**Disclaimer:** The information in this case study reflects the experiences and circumstances of Roma Independent School District and does not necessarily constitute ACTFL’s position or endorsement on the TIA.