

Implementing the AAPPL at an American School in Mexico

Case Study

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Note: *The American School Foundation, A.C. implements the AAPPL at each level (Lower, Middle, and Upper School). This case study has been based on the experiences at the Middle School.*

Introduction

In a bilingual, globally-minded American School in Mexico City, language educators faced a familiar yet complex challenge: how to accurately place students with widely varying proficiency levels in Spanish and English, while also delivering targeted instruction to support individual growth. With a highly mobile

international student population and diverse linguistic backgrounds, the need for a standardized, reliable tool was urgent. In 2021, the school turned to the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) to bridge this gap, and the results have been transformative.

Summary

The American School Foundation, A.C. in Mexico City is the oldest accredited American school outside the United States and one of the first international schools in the world. With more than 2,500 students representing over 40 countries, the school offers a coeducational, college-preparatory education for students ages 3 to 18.

English is the primary language of instruction across all grade levels, with Spanish integrated through a bilingual program in the lower school and secondary-level courses. The school embraces a multicultural environment where Spanish is the social language of the community. With approximately 280 teachers, the school fosters academic excellence in an international context.

Faced with the challenge of accurately identifying and supporting a diverse student body with varying language proficiency levels, the school turned to the ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) to find a solution. With students ranging from beginners to L1 speakers, the school needed a reliable and flexible tool to evaluate language skills and personalize instruction. Since implementing the AAPPL in 2021, the program has seen improvements in student

placement and more targeted teaching, enabling more balanced classes and better outcomes.

The Challenge


- Accurately assessing diverse proficiency levels among multilingual students
- Addressing gaps in speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills
- Supporting effective student placement and tailored instruction

The Solution

- Adopted the AAPPL across Middle School, Admissions, and other divisions
- Implemented computer-based, proctored testing sessions in multiple languages
- Used assessment data to support placement, progress monitoring, and instruction

The Results

- Improved student placement and class balance
- Enabled a more targeted and effective teaching approach
- Increased student engagement with strategic motivational efforts
- More positive overall testing experience and smooth implementation process



Without a standardized tool, it was difficult to tailor instruction effectively, monitor progress, and ensure that all students were receiving the targeted support they needed to succeed academically.

*Liliana Dominguez
and Gabriela Sanchez,
Middle School Language Teachers*

The Challenge: Diversity Without a Map

The middle school division, home to 540–600 students, includes about 120 students enrolled in the Spanish Language Acquisition program. Because of the school’s international profile, student enrollment and proficiency levels fluctuate throughout the year. Teachers needed a way to:

- Accurately assess students’ four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing
- Accommodate a mix of beginners, heritage speakers, and native speakers

- Align assessment practices with ACTFL proficiency guidelines and local curricular guidelines
- Enable more personalized instruction by understanding each learner’s capabilities

Without standardized testing, educators struggled to effectively tailor lessons or track language development over time.

The Solution: Implementing the AAPPL

In 2021, the school introduced the AAPPL to address its growing assessment needs. The decision was guided by several key features of the assessment:

- Comprehensive skill coverage (listening, speaking, reading, writing)
- ACTFL-aligned, internationally recognized standards (*ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* and *World-Readiness Standards*)
- Adaptable to varied proficiency levels, from beginners to advanced
- Flexible test administration, even during pandemic-related disruptions

Implementation at a Glance at the American School Foundation, A.C.

- **Languages tested:** Spanish and English
- **Testing format:** Computer-based, in-school, proctored by teachers
- **Scheduling:** 3–4 sessions of 75 minutes each, typically held in March/April for placement
- **Scope:** Middle School as well as Lower School, Upper School, and Admissions
- **Purpose:** Determine placement, monitor growth, and personalize instruction

Educators noted that their experience with Language Testing International® (LTI) was smooth and supportive, with reliable, actionable results.

Better placement leads to more balanced classes, students working in areas of growth opportunities, and more targeted teaching.

*Liliana Dominguez and Gabriela Sanchez,
Middle School Language Teachers*

The Results: Better Placement, Balanced Classrooms, Targeted Teaching

Since adopting the AAPPL, educators have observed meaningful improvements across the program:

- More accurate student placement, which has resulted in better-balanced classes
- Instruction more closely aligned to individual needs, supporting growth across skill areas
- Identification of stagnation points, especially in productive skills like speaking and writing, allowing teachers to adjust instruction accordingly

- Positive student engagement, especially when paired with motivational strategies (e.g., class rewards like pizza parties)
- Professional satisfaction with testing quality, reliability, and logistical ease

While challenges remain, such as ensuring student motivation and test stamina, educators are committed to the AAPPL as a core component of their language program.

Looking Ahead: Recommendations and Reflections

Why the AAPPL? According to Liliana Domínguez and Gabriela Sánchez, the AAPPL is an excellent tool for schools that:

- Need data-informed placement
- Serve multilingual or transient student populations
- Aim to offer personalized instruction aligned to proficiency-based frameworks
- Seek a well-supported measurement with reliable results

As the school continues to refine its use of the AAPPL, it also advocates for continued innovation. Still, the overall impact is clear: the AAPPL provides the clarity and confidence educators need to build stronger, more equitable language programs.

