

## Colombian Government Chooses iTEP Exam to Help Improve Nationwide English Proficiency



In 2009, the Colombian Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism and the Colombian Department of Education joined forces to devise an initiative aimed at attracting foreign investment into Colombia. By evaluating and improving the English proficiency levels of Colombian professionals, the government took one step closer to making Colombia a prime destination for foreign investment, and in particular, in the customer service and call center industries. The name chosen for this English improvement initiative was “ISPEAK”.



Colombian Minister of Commerce, Luis Guillermo Plata, was one of several high-ranking officials who took the iTEP exam to become more familiar with its many advantages as an English assessment tool.

As part of the program, the Ministries solicited bids from local and international language and testing organizations for an evaluative tool to be used in the English benchmarking element of the program. Boston Educational Services, the producer of the iTEP exam, and First Class English, the exclusive iTEP representative in Colombia, worked together to tailor the iTEP in accordance with the Colombian Ministries’ requests. Due to the many advantages of iTEP over its competitors, as well as the determination and hard work of First Class English, the iTEP was selected to be the English assessment tool for the first round of benchmarking for the ISPEAK program in October of 2009. The flexibility, ease of use, comprehensiveness, and cost-effective aspects of the iTEP were the main factors that helped iTEP win the coveted ISPEAK contract over the two other finalists, Berlitz and The British Council. In doing so, iTEP became the key evaluative tool used by the Colombian government to attract greater industry and foreign investment to Colombia.

The first round of testing took place over several weeks in the five largest Colombian cities, during which a total of 9,895 people took the iTEP exam and were certified at several different levels of English proficiency. “The goal was not to certify only the top levels (C1 and C2), but also to certify other levels as well, because there are many business sectors that require contracting people with basic or intermediate-level English,” reported the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* in its April 30, 2010 article covering the ISPEAK initiative.

The ISPEAK program, and its use of iTEP, has been a huge success to date. “The initiative achieved ‘promising’ results, according to experts in English instruction” (*El Tiempo*). In fact, the program has been so successful that additional rounds of testing have been implemented. “The Ministry of Commerce is conducting another round of exams in June, and a third round at the national level in September” (*El Tiempo*).

They held further exams in June 2010 and September 2010, testing on the national level. This local Bogota initiative of ISPEAK has been sub-branded “Talk to the World,” and is testing approximately 5,000 local Bogota professionals with the iTEP exam. The September round of ISPEAK will, once again, test on the national level.