

By ROBERT PIERCE

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Civics and citizenship teachers in the area heard from officials from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Monday.

The CIS officials spoke to the educators about a redesigned naturalization test process, the process itself and how to prepare students for the naturalization interview and test.

Michael Jones, senior advisor on immigrant education and testing for the Office of Citizenship, said workshops are offered for both full and half days.

“We call the half days the workshops and the full days the conferences,” he said. “What we try and do is help people understand an overview of the naturalization process and break it down more specifically into the specifics of the new test with the five skill areas a student will need to pass the test and a review of our resources.”

Immigration officials began redesigning the naturalization test about eight years ago, and Liberal was a pilot site for the new test, according to Jones, specifically the classroom of Elva Morales of the Colvin Adult Learning Center.

“We went into Elva’s classroom and gave a lot of the items on the new test to see if they work with different populations,” Jones said.

Jones added the basic structure of the test is the same as the previous test, but the contents have been changed to be more meaningful.



“We’ve added a lot more things about rights and responsibilities,” he said. “We’ve added things on geography. We’ve expanded history so that no longer are you just focusing on early American history and the Declaration of Independence. We’ve expanded it to cover every period in American history.”

Jones said the new test also contains an expanded list of possible correct answers, which was not available before.

The CIS department started with the development of Homeland Security in 2003, according to Jones.

“CIS is only one part of what was INS,” said John Beale, supervisory adjudication officer for the Wichita Service Office of CIS. “All of the border patrol, the inspections at airports, those were all part of INS. Now, they’re separate agencies of Homeland Security. CIS is strictly people applying for applications for citizenship, for work authorization, to petition for somebody from another country.”

Jones said there were many other pilot sites in addition to Liberal.

“Actually, we piloted the new test in 10 district offices around the country,” he said. “A person would go in and take the new test if they volunteered to do so. Also, we went into 64 different ESL programs and piloted it around the country.”

Jones said the changes were made to the naturalization test in order to standardize it more.

“We wanted to make it so that everybody’s getting the same test across the country, administered the same way and scored the same way,” he said.

Jones said one of the challenges in creating a new test is that everyone involved has different opinions about what should be on the test and how it should be administered.

“The whole idea of making a standardized, high-risk test is a challenge in itself,” he said.

Jones said the results of Morales’ class went into the mix of the other pilot tests.

“She would give us a lot of opinions along the way, too,” he said.

Jones said 142 items were piloted for the new test, and the results formed the final test.

“There were some items that didn’t work well,” he said. “Those items that didn’t work well, we re-piloted, took them back, rewrote them, re-piloted them again. If they didn’t work that time, usually we would get rid of those items.”

Morales said her class was given the test when it first came out.

“We asked the students first how they felt about it and if they would be willing to take this test,” she said. “They all were. They all took it, and they all did very well.”

Morales said Jones administered the test in Liberal last year. She said she believes the local involvement was very important to creating the test.

“It meant that even being out here in the middle of nowhere, we play an important part in the decisions that they make in Washington,” she said.