

Considerations for Assessing English Language Learner Students

This paper supplements the *Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts* developed by Achieve to offer an approach for districts to conduct a comprehensive, inclusive review of their assessment systems to increase their effectiveness and efficiency and to promote good assessment practice. English language learners (ELLs) now represent a substantial proportion of students in many districts, and this paper describes their history in the assessment system, as well as the connections between content and English language proficiency (ELP) assessments. It also provides a picture of differentiated need to serve this growingly diverse group of students.

Who are English language learners?

Roughly one in 10 students in U.S. public schools are classified as ELLs. The most basic definition of an ELL student can be found in Section 9101(25) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and reads as follows:

“[a student from a language minority background] whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual — (i) the ability to meet the State’s proficient level of achievement on State assessments described in section 1111(b)(3); (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society.”

Calculating a precise number of ELLs is not possible because different states and even different districts within a given state use different criteria and procedures for identifying ELLs. There is agreement that the numbers continue to grow and that growth is most notable in some regions of the country that have not historically had significant proportions of ELLs, such as the southeast and the midwest. There is also growing recognition of the diversity of languages spoken by ELLs, although Spanish continues to be the language spoken by the large majority of ELLs in most states and districts.

What are key historical considerations around theory, policy, and practice that affect current understanding around the assessment of ELLs?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENT

The assessment of students’ ELP was systematized beginning in 1974 to identify students in need of English language development support as part of legal compliance under the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Lau v. Nichols*. The research on second language acquisition at that time was modeled on paradigm-shifting work in the fields of linguistics and infant development that demonstrated the complexities



of grammatical development in human development.¹ Researchers during this time explored the parallels between first and second language acquisition, focusing on parallels in errors found in the syntax and word morphology of infants and second language learners. Many of the early assessments developed during this era followed suit and focused on oral language in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Awareness of uses of language for cognitive and academic purposes began in the 1980s, but it came primarily as part of an argument for bilingual education and therefore carried political baggage. Jim Cummins argued for a distinction between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS, often seen as oral language) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP, which is deeper and can be developed in a native language and transferred easily to English). Although the inherent values of bilingualism and biliteracy are now increasingly recognized, the earlier version of bilingual education became embroiled in the politics of English-only education and negativity about bilingualism that led to state ballot initiatives, which had repercussions nationwide, in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts.² During this period, formal assessment of literacy for ELLs was mainly available through norm-referenced reading tests for native English students.

The standards-based movement resurrected attention to the cognitive uses of language by introducing the domains of reading and writing into ELP assessment. California adopted English language development standards on the heels of its standards-based reading and literacy initiative. Assessment in the four domain areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing became the norm only in 2001 as a requirement of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (see below), moving assessment beyond vocabulary and grammar in oral language.

ACADEMIC ASSESSMENT

Like other students, ELLs are administered various academic assessments for multiple purposes, ranging from formative assessment for instructional support to classroom-based and curriculum-embedded assessments for benchmarking purposes to end-of-year summative assessments for determining whether students have mastered content. The shift from norm-based to standards-based testing that occurred in the 1990s created a strong push for the inclusion of ELLs as an equity consideration.

Because academic assessment tools are generally available only in English, the majority of issues raised about these assessments have been around practices such as accommodation to promote access and fairness (e.g., providing additional time, providing test directions orally, or offering glossaries). ESEA, through the past two reauthorizations, has carried the following language about the academic assessment of ELLs: “[They shall be] assessed in a valid and reliable manner and provided reasonable accommodations on assessments ... including, to the extent practicable, assessments in the language and form most likely to yield accurate data on what such students know and can do in academic content areas, until such students have achieved English language proficiency” (Sec. 1111).

Since the start of the federally regulated state standards movement in 1994, the assumption has been to err on the side of *inclusion* rather than exclusion, despite research evidence showing the shortcomings of most accommodation practices and the length of time it takes for ELLs to attain the sufficient ELP necessary for the tests to validly reflect the academic constructs. For example, current federal law allows the exclusion of ELLs from Title I accountability for a period of two years but requires them to be assessed after only one year. Underlying the justification for overinclusion rather than underinclusion is the assumption that ELLs will



not receive equitable attention if they are not included in the reporting and accountability system.

It is also important to note that although the law encourages assessments to be conducted in a student's native language (to the extent practicable), the law requires assessment in English after a period of two years. In addition, the historical and often divisive politics around bilingual education have created environments that are unfriendly to the development of long-term programs that support the use of students' native languages, reducing the commitment of most systems to invest in assessment tools outside of English.

What assessments are required by federal and state systems?

REQUIREMENTS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

The Office for Civil Rights within the U.S. Department of Education (USED) and the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice (DOJ) share responsibility for the enforcement of civil rights protections for ELLs, as required by *Lau v. Nichols* and provisions of the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (generally, these are referred to as Lau remedies). The Lau remedies require timely identification and classification of ELLs using a valid and reliable ELP assessment, placement in an appropriate and adequately implemented program, and continuous assessment of students' progress in English language development and academic content until they are exited from the program. Programs that temporarily emphasize English language acquisition over core academic subjects are still required to measure ELL progress in core subjects, not just ELP. If students are receiving core content instruction through their native language, they are required to be assessed in the

core subject areas in their language of instruction. Districts are required, at least annually, to assess ELP and determine students' eligibility to exit from the ELL services based on valid and reliable exit criteria.

The Lau remedies allow considerable local control over how exit (reclassification) decisions are made, and there are complex policy and implementation considerations in moving toward a common definition of ELL status.³ According to a survey conducted in the 2006–07 school year, 12 states used an ELP assessment only, while two states used only district-established criteria.⁴ The remaining 34 states surveyed used multiple criteria, including state and district content area assessment achievement scores.

REQUIREMENTS UNDER ESEA

Title I and Title III of ESEA both contain assessment requirements, which have separate assessment and accountability provisions, for ELLs. The ESEA Flexibility program, as administered by USED, is also relevant to consideration of these provisions and varies by state.

Title I

ELLs must be assessed under the same Title I requirements as all other students after their first year of attendance in a U.S. school. Their assessment scores for reading/language arts and mathematics are included as part of the accountability system after they have attended a U.S. school for a certain number of years (three years for reading/language arts, one year for mathematics). As previously noted, the assessments for ELLs must be valid and reliable, with reasonable accommodations, and to the extent practicable, they must be administered in the language and form most likely to yield accurate data. The state has the option to test reading/language arts in a language other than English for two additional years if a student is not found



to be English proficient on the ELP assessment. After three years, ELL students must be tested in English.

Title III

Under Title III, districts are required to annually assess ELLs on state ELP assessments aligned to the state ELP standards. Students must be assessed annually in each of the four domain areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, regardless of whether they have scored “proficient” in any given domain area (i.e., banking of proficiency attainment for any given domain from the prior year is not allowed). As part of accountability reporting, states must set targets and report progress toward the targets in (1) the percentage of students who make progress from one year to the next, (2) the percentage of students who attain proficiency on the state assessment, and (3) attainment of the state’s academic performance standard under Title I.

While different states have received waivers from Title I requirements under the ESEA Flexibility program, the waiver does not apply to Title III accountability requirements (except for demonstration of AYP on Title I).

One important aspect of the waiver relevant to Title III is the requirement that states adopt ELP standards that “correspond” to the college- and career-ready (CCR) standards of the state, which would alter the state Title III assessment. This requirement has resulted in most states shifting their ELP standards to look at the disciplinary language practices of content areas — particularly English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science — bringing about change to their aligned ELP assessments. It has not changed the requirement for assessing students in the four domain areas, which is specified in law.

How should the appropriateness of an assessment for an ELL student be determined?

The key consideration for an assessment is its alignment to the English proficiency standards that are used to guide the work of the district and state. As noted above, states are expected to have adopted ELP standards that *correspond* to the CCR standards of the state.⁵

Correspondence between the ELP standards and the content standards of a state (in ELA/literacy, mathematics, science, social studies, and other subject areas) is a relatively new concept. “Correspondence” was coined by psychometricians to avoid confusion and to distinguish it from the term “alignment” (which is imprecisely used in ESEA). The term “alignment” has a technical sense of a connection between equivalent artifacts, which if interpreted logically, would mean that the ELP standards are no different from the content standards.⁶

When talking about the relationship between ELP and content standards, “correspondence” is the preferred term because it *refers to the use of the language(s) necessary to engage in learning and the display of knowledge in the content standards as students participate in instruction* — the implied uses of language for content to be enabled in students. This is consistent with the federal definition of an ELL student, which refers to the English language barrier that would deny a student the ability to meet a state’s Title I proficiency standard or the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms in which the language of instruction is English.

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) produced a useful guidance document to help educators consider the correspondence of their ELP standards to their content standards — generally referred to as the [*ELPD Framework*](#). The Framework can be useful in evaluating the ELP standards



to which any assessment — including any local assessment — is aligned. Because many local ELP assessments may have been developed prior to current CCR standards, it is important to understand whether they meet the ELP needs of students who are expected to successfully achieve in content classrooms.

The ELPD Framework notes that ELP standards should not be seen as “a bridge to first cross” before acquiring CCR content standards. It acknowledges that students take many years — four to seven years by most estimates — to attain full proficiency in English as a second language and that even with imperfect English, students should be able to use English to actively engage in content learning. Indeed, most experts believe that the best context for learning English language skills is within the context of content area instruction as students engage with their peers in rich academic uses of language.⁷

The Framework identifies a protocol that can be used to examine the adequacy of the ELP standards. It is organized with respect to (1) its theoretical foundations, (2) its articulation of learning progressions, and (3) its consistency with the language demands of the content standards and concomitant classroom instructional expectations. Although this Framework is quite elaborate and most ELP standards underlying it will come up short in some areas, it is comprehensive and enables a district to take stock of how adequately it monitors the language development of its students. District leaders have noted the richness of the document, as well as its utility for helping curriculum and instruction staff work with ELL specialists in identifying a language development framework for the district.

The Framework asks: What are the theoretical foundations of the ELP standards? It asks for conceptualizations about the nature of language and how it develops. It asks whether

the standards take into account the age of learners, as well as their primary language and home cultural background. And it asks whether there is a process in place for continuous validation through research of the theoretical foundations. This expectation is consistent with the legal principles laid down in *Castañeda v. Pickard* and adopted by the USED Office for Civil Rights and the DOJ Civil Rights Division, whose first principle for compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act is whether the program serving ELLs is based on “sound educational theory” and therefore has a basis in law.⁸ It is also consistent with the practice of successful district leaders, such as Maria Santos, who has led her districts through a process of identifying a “language development framework” or “language allocation policy” for the district.⁹

The ELP standards are also expected to be explicit about the expected learning progressions with respect to academic learning. The Framework asks: How are the ELP standards organized such that they identify varying levels of students’ ELP and communicate students’ ability to manage cognitively demanding tasks across language proficiency levels? The Framework asks that the language proficiency assessment remain as independent as possible from the academic rigor that is expected of students at any given grade level, using content and academic expectations that are grade appropriate.

The organization of the ELP standards with respect to their correspondence to the CCR standards lies at the heart of the key needs of ELL students. This area of correspondence is the “sweet spot” of innovation for ELLs that can bring together the duality of language and academic content, both of which are required by civil rights law, but where there is frequent bifurcation of responsibility between the “ELL” and the “mainstream” perspectives among school and district staff.



How are the language demands contained in the different content area standards addressed in the ELP standards?

A *graphical display* developed by Understanding Language at Stanford University demonstrates how the practice standards made explicit in the major content standards — Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in ELA and mathematics and the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) — overlap with one another. This display highlights some of the similarities between the standards as well as some discipline-specific expectations for students as they learn in the disciplines. It also underscores the significant English language demands faced by ELLs as they engage in content area classes. Districts can use the graphical display as a guide to communicate the language demands of the new standards to staff as they review the adequacy of assessment instruments.

For reading, the Framework notes that the standards require students to become “increasingly adept at performing a range of difficult language practices whose degree of sophistication intensifies over time, from critically weighing and employing a growing range of evidence drawn from texts to becoming more attuned to discerning nuance, logic, ambiguity, and even inconsistency in an author’s reasoning” (page 7). In writing, students are called upon to write about evidence from reading literary and information texts and “must practice a range of language practices associated with research” (page 7). Additionally, the standards call for students to use “important aspects of successful teamwork: listening to one another critically but respectfully while expressing one’s own ideas with increasing specificity and precision. They must use their oral and aural skills to integrate and evaluate what they see and hear, adapting what they say dependent upon tone, context, and audience” (page 7).

In mathematics, the Framework highlights the practice standard, calling for students “to produce viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others,” and that this is a characteristic of mathematical discourse in which “arguments are chains of reasoning represented in sequences of sentences logically related to each other [U]nlike arguments in other fields, argument in mathematics does not rely upon empirical evidence, but upon proofs, precise definitions, properties, and prior results” (page 8).

For science, the Framework looks at the NGSS and calls out the language of scientific argumentation and how students “speak and listen as they present their ideas or engage in reasoned argumentation with others to refine their ideas and reach shared conclusions ... they learn the characteristics of a strong scientific justification of a claim and they learn to identify weak support” and “as they argue with others to arrive at a shared ‘best’ explanation or model, they are motivated to clarify both their language and their thinking by the atmosphere of shared interest and goals” (page 9).

Thus, the main relevant feature in the reformed ELP standards is their focus on discipline-specific language practices to help students integrate their ELP development with their disciplinary understanding. The primary goal is to enhance students’ ability to actively participate in mainstream classrooms, using different types of communicative activities embedded in subject matter pursuits. The goal is to support content instruction by making explicit the standards’ language demands and to guide designated (i.e., “stand alone”) English as a second language (ESL) instructional time toward supporting these demands through teacher collaboration.

It is important to re-emphasize that the expectation of the ELP standards is that ELP development will occur in parallel with rigorous academic development, not sequentially. As explicitly stated in the CCSS document, “the development of



native-like proficiency in English takes many years and will not be achieved by all ELLs especially if they start schooling in the U.S. in the later grades. Teachers should recognize that it is possible to achieve the standards for reading and literature, writing and research, language development and speaking and listening without manifesting native-like control of conventions and vocabulary.”¹⁰

Considerations for district assessment practice

Districts should understand that while state and federal requirements exist around the assessment of ELLs, as described above, a district has the obligation and right to administer assessments in the manner and form most likely to yield valid and reliable information about students’ English language and academic progress. Furthermore, in many states, the identification and reclassification of ELLs is in part locally determined.

The primary consideration for a district in evaluating the appropriateness of an assessment for ELLs should be its ability to assess, support, and promote authentic and rigorous academic uses of language by students in the classroom. *Assessments that are based primarily on older standards that are not aligned to the Framework should be considered for elimination.* The ELP standards upon which an assessment is based are the best starting point. A district should first ask whether the state ELP standards do indeed adequately address the characteristics of language delineated in the Framework and accordingly prioritize the assessments most aligned to those components of the state standards that are visibly connected to these disciplinary uses of language.¹¹

Another important consideration is the utility of an assessment for instructional organization. If the purpose of the assessment is to monitor progress among newcomer students, the assessment might pay attention to different

aspects of language depending upon the language development framework used by the district. If the purpose of the assessment is to manage the grouping of students during designated ESL instruction, a different approach may be called for. And if the purpose of the assessment is to enable collaboration between ESL and content instruction, then districts should choose assessments that maximize the disciplinary language practices because content teachers will see their own practices reflected in them. But in all situations, if the assessment is not aligned to standards that correspond to, and therefore move students along, a continuum of increasing active engagement with uses of language within academic content instruction, it should be considered for elimination.

What are appropriate accommodations for ELLs?

Thoughtfully produced content assessments are accompanied by recommendations for accommodation practices that increase the chances that the tests are valid for ELLs, particularly those at intermediate to advanced levels of ELP. *The quality and usefulness of the accommodation practices recommended should be a consideration in the assessment review process.*

The use of any academic assessments available in only English should be guided by their appropriateness for an individual student, making use of any validity information available. The use of accommodation practices should be guided by a variety of considerations, including the purpose of the assessment and the instructional setting. In no case should the intellectual rigor of the assessment be a consideration of whether the student should be included or excluded from participation. The goal should be to include a given student and to understand what the performance is measuring, since part of what is being measured will be ELP.



For example, it is well established that academic assessment scores are primarily a reflection of students' ELP until they attain roughly an intermediate range of English proficiency, after which point the relationship tapers.¹² Furthermore, performance on mathematics assessments tends to depend less on language proficiency than performance on ELA assessments. If there are differences between assessments of separate content areas, it is also highly likely that there will be differences between performance on item types that have differing language demands — for example, mathematics items that ask for explanations will undoubtedly depend more on language proficiency than would mathematics problems that require only a correct solution.

Most students also take two to four years to move beyond the intermediate range of English proficiency, but this is highly dependent on students' grade level at initial entry as well as on their proficiency level at entry in both English and literacy in their native language.¹³

These developmental expectations need to be taken into consideration in determining what sort of accommodation practice makes sense for any particular student. For any formal assessment, districts should look for publisher recommendations on research-based accommodation practices for ELLs, as well as documentation of its adherence to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.

Another important consideration is that with the new CCR standards and corresponding ELP standards, the language demands of most assessments will likely increase in rigor. As the new assessment systems are implemented and results become available in the coming years, districts should demand that states and consortia of states rapidly conduct research that illuminates the relationship between performance on the new content and ELP assessments.

Performance assessments

Special consideration should be given to performance assessment tasks that can be embedded in the curriculum or might be locally constructed and how they incorporate academic language. Performance tasks are important because they expose the many challenges that surround the education of ELLs regarding their access to rigorous and deep content in spite of their limitations in English proficiency. Performance assessment tasks can be constructed to interweave appropriately demanding uses of language while maintaining relevance, authenticity, and the engagement of students and simultaneously giving them support through materials that are appropriate for their English proficiency status. In this vision, collaborative teams of content and ESL teachers can construct performance assessments and examine student work products to set expectations and document student growth around their ability to use language-rich resources for learning and express their learning through language. For example, the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity has published the following set of quality criteria for performance assessment tasks: (1) clear and worthwhile performance outcomes; (2) task focus, clarity, and coherence; (3) student engagement: relevance and authenticity; (4) student engagement: choice and decision-making; (5) student engagement: accessibility; and (6) curriculum connected. Each of these criteria contain decisions about the role of language, and their negotiation within a collaborative team of teachers can enable professional growth to support the needs of ELLs. The assessment review team should be sure to ask what guidance the district provides around the language fairness of performance tasks that may be administered at the local level.



Assessments used to make exit/reclassification decisions for ELLs

While all states require use of the state ELP assessment to determine an ELL student's eligibility to exit the status and be reclassified as a fluent English proficient student, they vary in the additional considerations required, including formal assessments, grades, and teacher recommendations. Many of these additional requirements are determined locally. If additional assessments are used, they often include performance on the state content assessment (usually in ELA but occasionally in mathematics) but may also include a locally adopted reading and/or writing assessment. If an assessment is the result of a local decision, then the district should determine the appropriateness of the assessment and whether it is aligned to the state's CCR standards rather than to legacy general literacy standards — for example, an assessment that is taken from the reading portion of an existing ESL/English Language Development (ELD) textbook or an outdated ELA textbook. *If the assessment is not required by the state and is not aligned to state CCR standards, then the assessment should be considered for elimination.* Each district should take stock of its exit criteria and consult with mainstream and ESL/ELD staff, parents, and stakeholders (in many districts, representatives from a District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) may be the appropriate venue) to validate the decision to exit students.

Special considerations

The ELL population is diverse, and special consideration is necessary to appropriately assess students. In addition to a diversity of languages as well as the age at which students arrive in the U.S., consideration should be given to assessments used for students with interrupted formal education (SIFE), long-term English learners (LTELs), and ELLs with disabilities.

STUDENTS WITH INTERRUPTED FORMAL EDUCATION

A growingly noticeable population of older students arrive at school with significant interruptions in their formal education and are labeled as SIFE. New York state, for example, has developed a formal definition: a student who has had at least two years less schooling than his or her peers, functions at least two years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics, and may be preliterate in his or her native language. In addition to academic needs, SIFEs may come with significant social and emotional challenges. There are no federal guidelines for the assessment of SIFE students, but it is clear that an assessment of their learning and schooling history as well as of their literacy range in their native language would be beneficial for educational programming. Districts should demand that states and the federal government develop appropriate assessment protocols and tools to better understand the educational needs of SIFE students. Districts should engage community members to help understand the diversity of experiences of SIFE students and build on what they bring to the U.S. educational experience.

LONG-TERM ENGLISH LEARNERS

In recent years, educators have become increasingly aware of the distinction between newcomer ELLs and long-term ELLs. Though many ELLs can attain ELP and meet state and local reclassification criteria after five or six years, the remainder are long-term ELLs who continue to struggle academically.¹⁴ A commonly noted characteristic of LTELs, in addition to their low literacy skills, is their low academic engagement. Already tracked into less academically challenging classes in middle and high school, they are often placed in designated ESL/ELD classes, either mixed in with newcomers with very different



needs or grouped into classes with their peers where their sense of academic failure is simply reinforced by materials that underscore their self-concept. Students frequently note how they have come to hate the state ELP test because it reminds them of their failures, especially those sections that now come to them easily. The needs of LTELs are around academic literacy, engagement, and sense of efficacy. Assessment practices for these students should prioritize those practices that can be used formatively to address these needs and should avoid reinforcing the sense of failure and possible hatred for testing that has already developed in many LTELs. Because LTELs are older students who are capable of articulating their own needs and feelings, districts should consider interview protocols for use with the students to better understand how they feel about the assessment process.

ELLS WITH DISABILITIES

It is estimated that there are more than 500,000 ELL students nationally who are also identified as having a disability.¹⁵ The representation of ELL students in special education has been found to be disproportionate for decades. ELLs tend to be underrepresented at the elementary level and overrepresented in secondary school. This disproportionality is in large part due to the inadequacy of assessments used in the process of identifying, monitoring, and exiting these students from both ELL and special education services. A paper soon to be released from CCSO identifies many problems around the appropriateness of existing policies, processes, and instruments for this very diverse group of students. For example, the special education identification process is limited by the number of languages supported by the assessments, the uncontrolled quality of the translation of assessments, incomplete information on language

proficiency (in both English and students' native languages), and the efficiency of the evaluation process.¹⁶

When identifying ELLs for special education eligibility, assessment procedures should include gathering data that provide a comprehensive view of the child in a variety of settings. Assessments that differentiate and do not confound regular language acquisition processes with language-related disabilities should be retained and enhanced, but assessment approaches that do not incorporate the native language should be considered for elimination. Assessments are also needed that can determine appropriate exits from both ELL and special education services as well as help identify specific areas of intervention. Educators should incorporate RTI² (Response to Instruction and Intervention) procedures when trying to determine appropriate services for ELLs with disabilities. Finally, special attention should be given to developing assessment procedures for ELLs with low-incidence disabilities (e.g., intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, visual impairments, traumatic brain injury, autism spectrum disorders, etc.). Such students especially need assessments that appropriately measure their ELP.

Recommendations

While specific recommendations regarding assessments for ELLs occur throughout this document, the following recommendations come from the perspective of educators and parents as they consider the student assessment inventory process. In Table 1, a sample list of assessments administered by a composite of school districts in California in the early elementary grades is provided, along with questions that might be asked by the committee for each assessment during the inventory process.



Table 1. Sample early elementary assessment inventory table with ELL-specific questions

Assessments	Assessment Cycle	Purpose	Intended Use	Questions for the Inventory Process
CELDT	Annual	State required Assess English Language Proficiency of EL Students	ELD placement language instruction	How well is it aligned to the state ELP Standards? Although this is required by the state, the committee should ask this question in order to familiarize itself with the state standards.
SBAC – ELA	Annual	State-required ELA annual assessment	State and federal accountability, student progress monitoring, student placement	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Standards? How appropriate is it for differentiated needs of the ELL student? Although this assessment is required by the state, the committee should ask this question in order to familiarize itself with the standards, and with the differentiated language accommodation practices made available for ELLs by the assessment.
SBAC – Math	Annual	State-required math annual assessment	State and federal accountability, student progress monitoring, student placement	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Standards? How appropriate is it for differentiated needs of the ELL student? Although this assessment is required by the state, the committee should ask this question in order to familiarize itself with the standards, and with the differentiated language accommodation practices made available for ELLs by the assessment.
ELLA	Bi-Annual	Assess ELL student performance toward reclassification	Progress monitoring in English language proficiency	How well is it aligned to the state ELP Standards? How appropriate is it for the differentiated needs of the ELL student?
Writing Samples	Bi-Annual	Assess writing	Used to monitor progress	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Standards? How appropriate is it for differentiated needs of the ELL student?
Accelerated Reader	Unit, Trimester, Annual	Evaluate education programs, measure student progress (not all Grade 1 students)	Identify student needs/ strengths	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Standards? How appropriate is it for differentiated needs of the ELL student?
DIBELS NEXT	Trimester	Evaluate education programs, measure yearly progress, measure student progress	RTI, progress monitoring, SPED screener	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Standards? How appropriate is it for differentiated needs of the ELL student?
DRA2	Trimester	Instructional reading level, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension	Used to monitor progress and identify RTI students and their needs	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Standards? How appropriate is it for differentiated needs of the ELL student?

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Table 1. Sample early elementary assessment inventory table with ELL-specific questions (continued)

Assessments	Assessment Cycle	Purpose	Intended Use	Questions for the Inventory Process
DRA2 Word Analysis	Trimester	Phonological awareness, metalanguage, letter/word recognition, phonics and structural analysis/syllabication	Given to emerging and struggling readers to help students develop the skills needed for reading proficiency	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Standards? How appropriate is it for differentiated needs of the ELL student?
ELA Performance Task	Trimester	Assess writing and language skills	Used to monitor progress and identify RTI students and their needs	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Standards? How appropriate is it for differentiated needs of the ELL student?
ELA Site Benchmark	Trimester	To identify what skills and standards students have mastered within each unit and which students need additional teaching time	Used to monitor progress and identify RTI students and their needs	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Standards? How appropriate is it for differentiated needs of the ELL student?
Fountas and Pinnell BAS	Trimester	Measure student progress	Inform guided reading instruction (RTI, progress monitoring in the future)	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Standards? How appropriate is it for differentiated needs of the ELL student?
Math District Benchmark	Trimester	Evaluate education programs, measure yearly progress, measure student progress	Used to monitor progress and identify RTI students and their needs with math standards	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Math Standards? Are the language demands of the math items appropriate to the ELP level of the ELL student?
ELA-ELD Benchmark	Weekly	Identify where students need additional practice with the ELD/ELA standards	Used to monitor progress and identify RTI students and their needs	How well is it aligned to both the state CCRS Standards and the ELP standards?
Open Court REACH Unit Test	Weekly		Use for SST info/progress monitoring	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Standards? How appropriate is it for differentiated needs of the ELL student?
Go Math Quizzes	Weekly	Used as formative assessment to inform on weekly learning	Results are used to determine reteaching of standards	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Math Standards? Are the language demands of the math items appropriate to the ELP level of the ELL student?
Timed Math Facts	Daily, Weekly, Every six weeks	Assess math fact fluency	Identify where students need additional practice	How well is it aligned to the state CCRS Math Standards? Are the language demands of the math items appropriate to the ELP level of the ELL student?



1. The ELL expertise in the district should be engaged in all phases of the inventory process and not just in portions that concern ELL student identification, the monitoring and exiting process, or the assessment of students' English language development. ELLs are the collaborative responsibility of all school staff, and attention to their progress should not occur as a specialized event. Furthermore, parents and community members should be included in the inventory process, particularly to inform the process about ways in which students' prior educational backgrounds and community contexts can inform instruction and to develop a stronger understanding of the educational rationale for ELL student classification. Districts should also, to the extent possible, communicate with parents about assessments in languages other than English, both as part of the inventory process and in ongoing outreach.
2. All content assessments should be evaluated on the basis of alignment to a state's CCR standards for all students, and for ELLs, with respect to the quality of accommodations (including assessment through the native language) made available, differentiated by individual student needs. For students who are newcomers to U.S. schools, consideration should be given to using ELP assessments in place of content assessments, as content assessments lack validity at low ranges of English proficiency.
3. All ELP assessments should be evaluated with respect to alignment to a state's ELP standards, if the standards are judged to correspond to the state's CCR standards, as measured through the ELPD Framework. The assessment inventory committee should use this opportunity to learn about the increased and focused language demands of the new content standards, particularly around the expectation of greater student use of language for academic purposes. If an assessment is given as an interim or benchmark assessment, the committee should look at whether assessment time can be shortened in domains (such as listening and speaking) in which students have already attained proficiency.
4. The student assessment inventory process should examine the ELL student reclassification process and determine which assessments are part of district (rather than state) policy and whether the district-controlled assessments are appropriate. If not, the committee should decide whether to replace district assessments with standards-aligned assessments or remove the assessment if it is not required by the state.
5. The student assessment inventory process should examine processes that address ELL students with disabilities and look at the assessments used for these students. Assessments that differentiate and do not confound regular language acquisition processes with language-related disabilities should be retained and enhanced, but assessment approaches that do not incorporate students' native languages should be considered for elimination. In addition to ELLs with disabilities, SIFE and LTEL students should be considered in the student assessment inventory process. For SIFEs, additional information regarding their experiences and capabilities might be obtained through community interviews that supplement or supplant any formal assessment that might be given to the students. For LTELs, assessments that serve to simply reinforce the low academic esteem of the students should be identified, eliminated, and replaced by interviews that ask the students about their progress.
6. Assessment literacy efforts should include the participation of both general educators and ELL educators and specialists, and professional development should include information about ELLs and the



assessments they take. Many educators have little understanding of how to use assessments to support instruction, and there is a need for professional development on assessment literacy. All educators would benefit from learning more about how to design, construct, and evaluate assessments that measure students' learning of the intended targets. All teachers should be able to confidently make decisions and implement them for instruction and assessment. Preservice teachers also need to acquire assessment literacy, and it should be part of their training programs.

In conclusion, districts considering their assessments through the student assessment inventory process should bear in mind federal and state laws and policies governing ELLs but apply them in ways that are consistent with the differentiated needs of ELLs, including the length of time they have been in school and their educational history. In

addition, districts should use the opportunity to be broadly inclusive of stakeholders — all educators as well as parents and community members — to ensure that assessment practices are appropriate for the needs of the diversity represented within the ELL population.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ This was part of the so-called “cognitive revolution” in psychology. In language acquisition, the names most frequently associated with this paradigm change are Noam Chomsky and Roger Brown.
- ² State Seals of Biliteracy are increasingly popular.
- ³ Linquanti, R., & Cook, H.G. (2013). *Toward a “Common Definition of English Learner”: Guidance for States and State Assessment Consortia in Defining and Addressing Policy and Technical Issues and Options*. Downloaded at: www.ccsso.org/Documents/2013/Toward_a_Common_Definition_2013.pdf
- ⁴ Wolf, M.K. et al. (2008). *Issues in Assessing English Language Learners: English Language Proficiency Measures and Accommodation Uses*. Practice Review. CRESST Report No. 732. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA. Downloaded at: www.cse.ucla.edu/products/reports/R732.pdf
- ⁵ ESEA Flexibility requires states to adopt state ELP standards that correspond to the CCR standards of the state.
- ⁶ See ELPD Framework, Section 7, for a full discussion of the meaning of “correspondence” as contrasted with “alignment.”
- ⁷ Valdes et al. (2014). *Changes in the Expertise of ESL Professionals: Knowledge and Action in the Era of New Standards*. Downloaded at: <http://www.tesol.org/docs/default-source/papers-and-briefs/professional-paper-26-march-2014.pdf?sfvrsn=2>
- ⁸ U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights and U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. Dear colleague letter. Downloaded at: www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf
- ⁹ Horwitz, A. et al. (2009). *Succeeding with English Language Learners: Lessons Learned from the Great City Schools*. Council of the Great City Schools; Santos, M. “Leaders to Learn From.” Education Week. (2014). Downloaded at: <http://leaders.edweek.org/profile/maria-santos/>
- ¹⁰ *Application of Common Core State Standards for English Language Learners*. Downloaded at: www.corestandards.org/assets/application-for-english-learners.pdf
- ¹¹ The two state consortia — WIDA and ELPA21 — address this in different ways, as do the other states that are not part of the consortia.
- ¹² Title III supplemental study.
- ¹³ Hakuta, K., Goto Butler, Y., & Witt, D. (2000). *How Long Does It Take English Learners to Attain Proficiency?* University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute Policy Report 2000-1. Thompson, K. (in press). English Learners’ Time to Reclassification: An Analysis. *Educational Policy*.
- ¹⁴ Olsen, L. *Reparable Harm: Fulfilling the Unkept Promise of Education Opportunity for California’s Long Term English Learners*. Californians Together. Downloaded at: www.corestandards.org/assets/application-for-english-learners.pdf
- ¹⁵ Watkins, E., & Liu, K.K. “Who Are English Language Learners with Disabilities?” In Liu, K., Watkins, E., Pompa, D., McLeod, P., Elliott, J. & Gaylord, V. (Eds.) *Impact: Feature Issue on Educating K-12 English Language Learners with Disabilities* 26:1. (2013). Retrieved from: <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/261/2.html>
- ¹⁶ Magee, J., Martinez, M., Park, S., Paul, J., & Willner, L.S. (in preparation). *English Language Learners with Disabilities: A Call for Additional Research and Policy Guidance*. ELL SCASS, Council of Chief State School Officers.