



Assessment Of Dual Language Learners And English Learners¹

Assessing the educational progress of dual language learners (DLLs) and English learners (ELs) provides students with feedback on their learning and teachers with information that can be used to shape instruction and communicate with parents on their children's progress. Assessments also offer school leaders information on areas of strength and weakness in instruction, and system leaders information on the overall performance of their programs.

A report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures* (2017), offers recommendations for developing and administering assessments for dual language learners and English learners. This brief summarizes those recommendations.



Assessment of DLLs

The main purposes for early care and education (ECE) assessments of DLLs are to:

1. promote learning and development of individual children;
2. identify children with special needs and health conditions for intervention purposes;
3. monitor trends in programs and evaluate program effectiveness; and
4. obtain benchmark data for accountability purposes at the local, state, and national levels.

¹ When referring to children aged birth to 5 in their homes, communities, or early care and education programs, the term “dual language learners” or “DLLs” is used. When referring to children aged 5 or older in the pre-K-12 education system, the term “English learners” or “ELs” is used. When referring to the broader group of children and adolescents aged birth to 21, the term “DLLs/ELs” is used.



ECE Assessments of DLLs should:

- ▶ Include developmental screening, observation, and ongoing assessments that monitor progress over time
- ▶ Observe children's behavior, language use, and progress across all domains of development in natural settings
- ▶ Be organized around educationally significant outcomes
- ▶ Guide teachers' instructional decision-making to improve and individualize classroom strategies for each child
- ▶ Measure progress against what is typically expected of children growing up with more than one language
- ▶ Determine a child's proficiency in both English and the home language
- ▶ Be carefully selected and interpreted based on information regarding the child's early language and learning environment
- ▶ Be administered by educators and assessors who are knowledgeable about the developmental complexities of first and second language
- ▶ Use multidisciplinary teams that include qualified bilingual and bicultural assessors
- ▶ Include families in all aspects of the assessment process
- ▶ Be linguistically and culturally appropriate
- ▶ Employ multiple methods and measures due to lack of psychometrically sound language proficiency measures for preschool children



Assessment of ELs

Despite well-established standards for assessing students and education systems, states vary widely in how they identify, assess, and reclassify ELs. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, states will have primary responsibility for developing common assessment practices for identifying students as ELs, measuring their progress over time, and determining when they should exit from EL status.

Identification and Reclassification

ESSA requires consistent statewide procedures for identifying and reclassifying English learners. These decisions determine the services to be provided to the student and have demonstrable long-term impacts on educational outcomes. As such, experts recommend use of multiple assessments in making these high-stakes decisions.

Reclassification to non-EL status assumes that an EL is sufficiently proficient in English that they can master required academic content in English without additional supports. State ELP assessments must measure students' proficiency in the areas of speaking,



listening, reading, and writing. It is essential to demonstrate the validity of an ELP assessment in measuring the expected academic language demands of the classroom; however, there is no single coherent underlying theory of ELP with a strong basis in validated research at this time. A recent² report offers nine recommendations for improving the validity and utility of EL reclassification decision systems.

Assessment of Academic Achievement

ESSA requires states to adopt challenging academic standards for proficiency in language arts/reading, mathematics, and science and to establish methods to evaluate English learners' progress on meeting these standards. ESSA states that ELs "shall be assessed in a valid and reliable manner and provided appropriate 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." Challenges are entailed in validating assessments for all students, but especially for ELs because every assessment is in part a language assessment. While there are no widely accepted guidelines on which accommodations to use and under what circumstances, the following can serve as basic guidelines for assessment practitioners:

- ▶ Use simplified English in test design, and remove extraneous language demands.
- ▶ Match the language of tests and accommodations to the language of instruction.
- ▶ Provide English dictionaries/glossaries.
- ▶ Provide extended time, or use untimed tests



Conclusions

Assessment measures and practices can impact the educational success of dual language learners and English learners. To conduct an accurate assessment of the instructional needs of DLLs/ELs, it is essential to consider their skills in both English and their home language. The appropriate use of assessment tools and practices, as well as the communication of assessment results to families and decision makers, requires that all stakeholders be capable of understanding and interpreting the results of academic assessments administered to ELs in English or their home language, as well as ELP assessments.

² Linqanti and Cook, 2015

This brief is based on the report *Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures*, a PDF of which can be downloaded free of charge at <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24677>.