

International Reading Association Recommendations to National Assessment Governing Board, November 16, 2009

The International Reading Association (IRA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on recommendations for uniform national rules for testing of Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). IRA has done considerable work on the issue of ELL language assessment.

There are several important issues that influence instruction of English-learning students, but perhaps none occupy discussion and decision-making more than language of instruction and assessment. Regardless of the language of instruction, important adjustments and adaptations must be made to ensure the best educational experience for English-learning students.

- The language of assessment is an important decision. It is important to match the language of assessment to the language of instruction.
- If both materials and qualified bilingual assessors are available, a determination must be made as to whether to assess in one language or two. The goals of assessment must be considered. Specific issues include whether the available measures are comparable (if a comparison of results is intended), and whether measures similar to those being assessed have been developed or adapted for use with students.
- Assessments of reading and content achievement should be criterion-referenced.
- If the goal is to distinguish between language or learning difficulties and English language proficiency, and the assessments evaluate the same domain of knowledge or skill at comparable levels with equivalent precision, assessment in both languages is appropriate. Natural language sampling should also be considered if trained bilingual assessors (usually speech-language pathologists or linguists) are available.
- If assessment materials and assessors are available only in English and instruction is provided in English, assessments should be in English.
- It is important that English-learning students be offered appropriate research-based accommodations to minimize any language challenge they may encounter during the assessment.
- Assessment/measurement of student abilities is critical to both research and the documentation of student progress
- It is important to explore whether there are basic principles that should be followed generally for assessing language minority students, and under what conditions for which populations would these apply, and for which assessment purposes.
- Until we have addressed the issue of how language underlies assessment and how best to develop new content area measures for ELL students, we need research on how accommodations can be used to best advantage to assist student learning and assessment.

- There is a need for measures in various areas, including language proficiency, various aspects of reading including reading comprehension, and comprehension within specific content areas, as well as content knowledge itself.
- Research is needed that will determine the level of language proficiency required for content area assessments to function equivalently for ELL and non-ELL students; it would significantly advance the area of ELL assessment if we understood how language undergirds performance on tests of all types and how construct-irrelevant variance associated with language can be controlled, predicted, or eliminated in content area assessment.
- More research is needed on the impact of assessment design and implementation on individual student learning and on teaching patterns.
- There is an ongoing need for development of new measures of both reading comprehension and content area knowledge for ELL students, in English and in a variety of languages other than English, when instruction is also conducted in those languages (e.g., in dual language programs); this will require clearly defined or delineated constructs to be measured. The norming of existing measures on ELL students, where no such normative data exist, is also important.
- Research is needed on how best to help teachers become expert in the use of those measures that serve well for progress monitoring and the data they generate, in order to differentiate instruction to maximize student learning.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the recommendations for uniform national rules for testing of Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners on the NAEP. We look forward to working with you and providing additional information about approaches that can be included to make this extremely important initiative a successful one for students, educators, and the general public. Please don't hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance in any way.