

National Education Association (NEA), submitted by Luis-Gustavo Martinez, Senior Policy Analyst, Education Policy and Practice Department

Good morning members of the National Assessment Governing Board.

I am here today representing the National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest professional employee organization. Our 3.2 million members work at every level of education-from pre-school to university graduate programs.

Achievement gaps among English Language Learners (ELLs) are deeply rooted, pervasive, and complex, and NEA is working with members individually and collectively to help address the learning needs of all ELLs.

America's public schools enroll about 5.5 million ELLs – twice the number from just 15 years ago, and that number is expected to double again by 2015. English language learners are the fastest growing group of students in the United States with an annual growth rate of approximately 10 percent. Most of the ELL students are not immigrants or recent arrivals. More than three-fourths of the ELL elementary students are native-born; more than half of secondary ELL students are native born. Recent statistics reported by the PEW Hispanic Center illustrate that only about 8 percent of ELL secondary students are born in other countries and enter US schools in middle or high school.

Nearly 8 out of 10 ELLs speak Spanish, but some districts have students who represent more than 100 different language groups. (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Education Programs (NCLEA), 2007)

More than 60 percent of culturally diverse ELLs are in six states: Arizona, California, Texas, New York, Florida, and Illinois. Between 1995 and 2005, seven states had a 300 percent increase in ELLs: Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Nebraska, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

The backgrounds of culturally diverse ELL students born in the United States and immigrants vary widely and their formal education in their first language also vary widely, which can challenge their ability to flourish academically in U.S. schools.

Growth in the number of ELLs has continued to explode in many states, particularly in states without a history of serving ELL students and community.

On behalf of the NEA, I submit the following for your consideration:

- 1) *NEA supports disaggregated reporting of ELL test results that include detailed information on students' English language proficiency and academic content achievement results and the availability of accommodations that maximize meaningful participation in the NAEP. It is*

essential to disaggregate data and determine how all students are progressing. In this instance, however, the subgroup is constantly changing as new students move in and other students gain sufficient English skills to move out of the category. (Note: it would be interesting for NAEP to consider reporting not only the academic achievement in reading, math and science but also the English language proficiency level that accompanies the academic content results)

- 2) *The NEA encourages ELL-responsive accommodations that maintain the constructs in the NAEP framework, including items and directions in plain language, side-by-side bilingual Spanish-English test booklets, word-to-word bilingual glossaries without definitions, as well as other accommodations currently allowed by NAEP. The accommodations for each student should be selected at the local level by school personnel who are qualified to make judgments regarding the inclusion of the ELL in NAEP, including knowledge of his or her level of English language proficiency and review what accommodations are allowed and used during ongoing classroom instruction and participation in either/both state standardized tests and formative assessment.*
- 3) *NAEP results for ELL students should be disaggregated and reported by the best available standardized assessment data on the level of English language proficiency. The NEA supports the recommendation that data obtained from ELL students should be used strictly for research and analysis purposes only and to refine classroom instruction.*
- 4) *The NEA supports efforts for comparable participation rates across states and districts. Special efforts should be made to inform and solicit the cooperation of state and local officials deciding participation of individual students. NEA also supports a high common goal for 95 percent or more of ELL students sampled to participate in the assessment process.*
- 5) *NEA encourages NAEP to adopt an aggressive timeline for innovation and research, including (a) the development of test items written in plain language; (b) a short test of English language proficiency; (c) targeted testing with blocks of items at low and high levels of difficulty; and (d) computerized administration of the assessment when feasible.*

We recommend that the Board continue to seek the advice of experts with expertise in:

...linguistics; language development specialists or speech language pathologists; researchers and clinicians in this highly specialized area; second language acquisition experts; specialists in developing English language proficiency standards and academic content standards and the alignment between the two sets of standards; assessment development experts for both language and content; the corresponding alignment of the assessments to the ELP and content standards; an expert in ELL placement assessments based on standards with a

deep understanding of the multiple levels of English language proficiency; curriculum directors and teachers in the highly specialized areas of language development; and language acquisition and academic content instruction in English and the "heritage languages" (GILD, 2009).

In summary, we encourage the Board to boldly act upon these recommendations and include English Language Learners in a fair, robust and responsible accountability system. The time is now to offer ELLs the opportunity to participate in NAEP. It is not enough to do our best ... we must do what is right (Izquierdo, 2009).

References:

National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Education Programs (NCLEA), 2007)

Ad Hoc Committee on NAEP Testing and Reporting of Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners: PUBLIC COMMENT ON POLICY OPTIONS (Testimony on the policy options was received at two public hearings, the first in El Paso, TX on January 30, 2009 and the second in Washington, DC on February 4, 2009.)

- The Global Institute for Language and Literacy Development, LLC (GILD), submitted by Kathleen Leos
- Dr. Elena Izquierdo, Associate Professor, University of Texas at El Paso