



NATIONAL ASSESSMENT GOVERNING BOARD

Briefing and Discussion: Assessment of English Language Learners

In 2010, the Governing Board adopted a policy for enhancing the inclusiveness of NAEP by testing more English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities. Through this policy, the Governing Board intended not only to make NAEP more inclusive but also to make inclusion and accommodation practices more consistent across states and TUDA participants. Further, the policy called for NCES to report which states meet, and fail to meet, the Board's inclusion targets of assessing at least 85 percent of students with disabilities (SD) and English language learners (ELL).

Session Purpose. Five years after establishing this policy represents sufficient time to reflect on its early implementation, its initial successes, and its ongoing challenges. The Board policy for inclusion remedies the inconsistencies and confusion of the pre-2010 policy and aims to increase the inclusiveness of NAEP. Now, five years later, what successes in policy implementation can be highlighted? And what unintended challenges and new questions have emerged from implementing the policy? Where is the balance between ensuring that NAEP participants are prepared to perform at their full potential? Improvement requires constant reflection, and this full Board session on the ELL policy provides the forum in which to reflect on the implementation of the policy thus far.

Session Overview. This full session at the Board meeting will (1) review the inclusion policy for ELLs; (2) highlight data NCES collects through NAEP about ELLs, exclusion rates, and accommodations; and (3) describe the context for ELLs and assessments at the intersection of state and federal policy. These presentations will be followed by an open discussion among the Board about the policy, its implementation, and challenges in amending and revising the policy.

As background for this session, Attachment A presents a brief timeline of the NAEP inclusion policy. Attachment B includes the Board's official Policy Statement on NAEP Testing and Reporting on Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners. Please note that this session at the March 2015 Board meeting focuses on the policy as regards to English Language Learners.

Policy Overview. The current policy states that ELL students who have been enrolled in a U.S. school for at least one full academic year before the NAEP assessment should be included in the NAEP assessment. Accommodations should be offered, if necessary, to ELLs to participate, but should not alter the constructs assessed. Bilingual versions of NAEP in Spanish and English should be prepared in all subjects, except reading and writing and except in grade 12, to the extent deemed feasible by NCEES. In practice, math and science assessments include Spanish/English bilingual versions, while other NAEP subjects (again, except reading and writing) allow the use of a bilingual dictionary. When administering NAEP, NCEES collects data about whether students meet the one year criterion and with what, if any, accommodations they take the assessment. Analyzing these data by state can illuminate inconsistencies across states and help determine where improving ELL performance may require more attention.

Challenges to Implementing the Policy. Since the Governing Board established this inclusion policy, there have been some issues in its implementation. For example, the Board policy requires the informed cooperation of school coordinators and NAEP field staff, and the accuracy and completeness of school-provided information, on which major decisions hinge, are assumed. In 2013, the school coordinator received a list of sampled students three to eight weeks before NAEP administration. The school coordinator gathered information on these students from the school files, including if they had been enrolled in U.S. schools for one full academic year or more and decided whether sampled students could participate and what, if any, accommodations were needed. When NAEP field staff arrived at the school in a pre-assessment visit, they reviewed these decisions with the school coordinator. If the student had been enrolled for more than a year, then the student took NAEP with the allowable accommodations necessary. If the student had been enrolled less than a year, the student was eligible to be excluded from the NAEP assessment in accordance with the Governing Board policy. If the student was enrolled less than a year and was Spanish speaking, he/she took the bilingual assessment, except in reading and writing, which was not translated due to the constructs as defined in the Board-adopted Reading and Writing Frameworks.

In 2015, the in-person pre-assessment review process was replaced by a computer-based method. School staff received a list of sampled students in early December (about a month before they received the list in 2013) and input the same information about student backgrounds and accommodation needs into a database. If school coordinators had any questions, they could call their NAEP representative or a NAEP help desk for answers and resolutions to problems. Once the student information was entered in the database, the field staff conducted a pre-assessment review call with school coordinators to confirm the entries, update any missing data, make any corrections, and finalize preparations for assessment day. Because the field staff and school staff completed all the information via computer, the field staff did not visit the school prior to the assessment day. This relatively simple process assumes that school coordinators know students' complete enrollment records.

The use of language proficiency screeners may sidestep implementation issues, but there are potential challenges with their use. In the policy statement five years ago, the Board called for a brief, easily-administered test of English language proficiency to determine whether students should receive a translation, adaptive testing, or other accommodations because of limited English proficiency. As of now, there is not sufficient certainty or validity with extant screeners to make them useful to NAEP at this time. WIDA and ELPA-II, the most prominent screeners, are not yet ready to implement in NAEP and may not be applicable by purpose and design (to determine eligibility and exit criteria for ELL programs) or by their definition of proficiency. These screeners typically define proficiency by reading, writing, listening, and speaking English proficiently, but NAEP requires only reading and writing proficiency. Now, with the advent of Digital-Based Assessments, NAEP may begin to pursue a NAEP-specific screener to determine eligibility for ELL participation in the assessment, and the Board may commission white papers on the feasibility of this approach.

Other challenges may inhibit the fulfillment of the policy's intentions, for example, in reporting on and interpreting student performance. Taken as a subgroup, the average score of ELL students is significantly lower than that of English proficient peers. But, the relatively low scores of ELL students may be due to language translation issues, not to lack of knowledge in the tested subject matter.

Inclusion Policy within Broader State Context. Issues about assessing ELL students remain prominent among states as well. Last month, the U.S. Department of Education issued a waiver to Florida, which reignited debate about including ELLs in assessments and in accountability programs. Federal accountability provisions as outlined in No Child Left Behind include guidelines for implementing regulations, such as Title I and Title III policies. States must submit for Department approval their policies for including ELL students in their accountability programs. States can request waivers to these approved accountability programs, which is what Florida did.

In this specific case, Florida requested one additional year before including recently-arrived ELLs in one component of the state's accountability system. Under Title I regulations, the Department holds states accountable for the performance of recently-arrived English learners by requiring that those students participate in reading and math assessments after they have been in U.S. schools for more than one year and including those results in accountability determinations. But Florida exceeds this requirement for testing. In Florida, all ELLs, regardless of how long they have attended school in the United States, take the state's math and English language arts assessments and are included when Florida calculates performance against Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) for all students and for the ELL subgroup. With the waiver granted, recently-arrived students in Florida will continue to be included in the growth component of the state accountability system after 12 months and included in the performance component after 24 months. Representatives from the Department will explain more about the history of ELLs and state assessments as well as the waiver issues during the March 6 ELL presentation to the Board.

Timeline of English Language Learners' Participation in NAEP

Before 1996 – ELLs who required accommodations were excluded from NAEP participation; no accommodations were offered or provided.

- Students were excluded if mainstreamed less than 50 percent of the time in academic subjects and were judged by school staff as incapable of participating meaningfully in the assessment.

1996 – Publication of Focus on NAEP report about increasing participation of ELL students; NAEP began a transition in which official reporting samples would include students assessed with accommodations.

1998 – NAEP introduces accommodations on the operational assessment; 50% received accommodations and 50% did not receive accommodations (signified by two data points on graphs and tables). The Board policy then on ELL inclusion:

- All English language learners who had taken academic instruction in English for three or more years (including the testing year) were to participate in NAEP.
- English language learners who had received fewer than three years of instruction in English should have been included if they were capable of doing so as determined by school administrators.
 - English language learners who fit these criteria and whose native language was Spanish could participate in the Spanish version of the assessment (if available and determined by school staff).
- English language learners could use the same accommodation in NAEP assessments as they used in their usual classroom assessment unless disallowed by NAEP.

2003 – Edward Haertel of Stanford University shows that relying on school administrator determinations means that states are inconsistently applying NAEP inclusion and accommodation policies, thus different types of students are tested by NAEP across different states, which renders state comparisons infeasible and explains differences in NAEP performance.¹

2005 – GAO reports on exclusion of special needs students from NAEP; NAEP implements decision tree that NAEP site administrators use to decide whether to include ELL students in NAEP and what, if any, accommodations to apply.

¹ Haertel, E. F. (2003 December). *Including Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners in NAEP: Effects of Differential Inclusion Rates on Accuracy and Interpretability of Findings*. Retrieved February 12, 2015 from <http://www.nagb.org/content/nagb/assets/documents/publications/conferences/haertle.pdf>.

2006-2010 – Board explores challenges with and possible revisions to NAEP’s inclusion policy.

2006 – NAEP Validity Studies Panel commissions report on how states should understand the performance of ELLs on NAEP.

2008 – Board forms Ad Hoc Committee on NAEP Testing and Reporting of Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners.

2009 – Technical Advisory Panel on Uniform National Rules for NAEP Testing of English Language Learners convened, hears expert testimony.

2010 – Board adopts new policy for inclusion of ELL students in NAEP (see Attachment C), excerpt:

- All English language learners selected for the NAEP sample who have been in United States schools for one year or more should be included in the National Assessment.
- Those in U.S. schools for less than one year should take the assessment if it is available in the student’s primary language.

2012 – New decision tree is piloted for operational implementation in 2013.

2013 – ELL consortia present to Governing Board on potential use of and issues surrounding current available language screeners.

2015 – Five years after adoption of inclusion policy, Board examines policy implementation for ELL students.

National Assessment Governing Board
NAEP Testing and Reporting on
Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners
Policy Statement

INTRODUCTION

To serve as the Nation's Report Card, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) must produce valid, comparable data on the academic achievement of American students. Public confidence in NAEP results must be high. But in recent years it has been threatened by continuing, substantial variations in exclusion rates for students with disabilities (SD) and English language learners (ELL) among the states and urban districts taking part. Student participation in NAEP is voluntary, and the assessment is prohibited by law from providing results for individual children or schools. But NAEP's national, state, and district results are closely scrutinized, and the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) believes NAEP must act affirmatively to ensure that the samples reported are truly representative and that public confidence is maintained.

To ensure that NAEP is fully representative, a very high proportion of the students selected must participate in its samples, including students with disabilities and English language learners. Exclusion of such students must be minimized; they should be counted in the Nation's Report Card. Accommodations should be offered to make the assessment accessible, but these changes from standard test administration procedures should not alter the knowledge and skills being assessed.

The following policies and guidelines are based on recommendations by expert panels convened by the Governing Board to propose uniform national rules for NAEP testing of SD and ELL students. The Board has also taken into consideration the views expressed in a wide range of public comment and in detailed analyses provided by the National Center for Education Statistics, which is responsible for conducting the assessment under the policy guidance of the Board. The policies are presented not as statistically-derived standards but as policy guidelines intended to maximize student participation, minimize the potential for bias, promote fair comparisons, and maintain trends. They signify the Board's strong belief that NAEP must retain public confidence that it is fair and fully-representative of the jurisdictions and groups on which the assessment reports.

The complete policy may be accessed online at:

http://www.nagb.org/content/nagb/assets/documents/policies/naep_testandreport_studentswithdisabilities.pdf

POLICY PRINCIPLES

1. As many students as possible should be encouraged to participate in the National Assessment. Accommodations should be offered, if necessary, to enable students with disabilities and English language learners to participate, but should not alter the constructs assessed, as defined in assessment frameworks approved by the National Assessment Governing Board.
2. To attain comparable inclusion rates across states and districts, special efforts should be made to inform and solicit the cooperation of state and local officials, including school personnel who decide upon the participation of individual students.
3. The proportion of all students excluded from any NAEP sample should not exceed 5 percent. Samples falling below this goal shall be prominently designated in reports as not attaining the desired inclusion rate of 95 percent.
4. Among students classified as either ELL or SD a goal of 85 percent inclusion shall be established. National, state, and district samples falling below this goal shall be identified in NAEP reporting.
5. In assessment frameworks adopted by the Board, the constructs to be tested should be carefully defined, and allowable accommodations should be identified.
6. All items and directions in NAEP assessments should be clearly written and free of linguistic complexity irrelevant to the constructs assessed.
7. Enhanced efforts should be made to provide a short clear description of the purpose and value of NAEP and of full student participation in the assessment. These materials should be aimed at school personnel, state officials, and the general public, including the parents of students with disabilities and English language learners. The materials should emphasize that NAEP provides important information on academic progress and that all groups of students should be counted in the Nation's Report Card. The materials should state clearly that NAEP gives no results for individual students or schools, and can have no impact on student status, grades, or placement decisions.
8. Before each state and district-level assessment NAEP program representatives should meet with testing directors and officials concerned with SD and ELL students to explain NAEP inclusion rules. The concerns of state and local decision makers should be discussed.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

1. All English language learners selected for the NAEP sample who have been in United States schools for one year or more should be included in the National Assessment. Those in U.S. schools for less than one year should take the assessment if it is available in the student's primary language. One year or more shall be defined as one full academic year before the year of the assessment.
2. Accommodations should be offered that maximize meaningful participation, are responsive to the student's level of English proficiency, and maintain the constructs in the NAEP framework. A list of allowable accommodations should be prepared by NAEP and furnished to participating schools. Such accommodations may be provided only to students who are not native speakers of English and are currently classified by their schools as English language learners or limited English proficient (LEP).
3. Bilingual versions of NAEP in Spanish and English should be prepared in all subjects, other than reading and writing, to the extent deemed feasible by the National Center for Education Statistics. The assessments of reading and writing should continue to be in English only, as provided for in the NAEP frameworks for these subjects.
4. Staff at each school should select from among appropriate ELL-responsive accommodations allowed by NAEP, including bilingual booklets, those that best meet the linguistic needs of each student. Decisions should be made by a qualified professional familiar with the student, using objective indicators of English proficiency (such as the English language proficiency assessments [ELPA] required by federal law), in accordance with guidance provided by NAEP and subject to review by the NAEP assessment coordinator.
5. Schools may provide word-to-word bilingual dictionaries (without definitions) between English and the student's primary language, except for NAEP reading and writing, which are assessments in English only.
6. NAEP results for ELL students should be disaggregated and reported by detailed information on students' level of English language proficiency, using the best available standardized assessment data. As soon as possible, NAEP should develop its own brief test of English language proficiency to bring consistency to reporting nationwide.
7. Data should be collected, disaggregated, and reported for former English language learners who have been reclassified as English proficient and exited from the ELL

category. This should include data on the number of years since students exited ELL services or were reclassified.

8. English language learners who are also classified as students with disabilities should first be given linguistically-appropriate accommodations before determining which additional accommodations may be needed to address any disabilities they may have.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

The Governing Board supports an aggressive schedule of research and development in the following areas:

1. The use of plain language and the principles of universal design, including a plain language review of new test items consistent with adopted frameworks.
2. Adaptive testing, either computer-based or paper-and-pencil. Such testing should provide more precise and accurate information than is available at present on low-performing and high-performing groups of students, and may include items appropriate for ELLs at low or intermediate levels of English proficiency. Data produced by such targeted testing should be placed on the common NAEP scale. Students assessed under any new procedures should be able to demonstrate fully their knowledge and skills on a range of material specified in NAEP frameworks.
3. A brief, easily-administered test of English language proficiency to be used for determining whether students should receive a translation, adaptive testing, or other accommodations because of limited English proficiency.
4. The validity and impact of commonly used testing accommodations, such as extended time and small group administration.
5. The identification, measurement, and reporting on academic achievement of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. This should be done in order to make recommendations on how such students could be included in NAEP in the future.
6. A study of outlier states and districts with notably high or low exclusion rates for either SD or ELL students to identify the characteristics of state policies, the approach of decision makers, and other criteria associated with different inclusion levels. The Governing Board requests NCES to prepare a research agenda on the topics above. A status report on this research should be presented at the November 2010 meeting of the Board.