



Success Indicator IN11: The school has clear procedures governing the collection, analysis and use of data from multiple assessments on ELs' academic performance, including formative as well as summative assessments. (5888)

Overview: According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016a), educators need tools to allow them to continually monitor EL students' progress in language proficiency and content knowledge accurately so that they can effectively address ELs' academic and linguistic strengths and weaknesses and provide differentiated instruction (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). These assessment tools can be used within comprehensive and coherent assessment systems that both provide multiple sources of data for progress monitoring, and support EL students' language acquisition and content learning simultaneously (Heritage, et al., 2013).¹

Questions: What types of assessment data inform schools' progress monitoring and instructional planning for ELs? How can school teams use assessment data in ways that support EL learning?

What types of assessment data inform schools' progress monitoring and instructional planning for ELs?

English Learners (ELs) continue to lag behind their non-EL peers on national tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).² Performance gaps may in part be due to the fact that "the language demand placed on EL students [of achievement tests] may eclipse their display of academic content knowledge" (Dutro, 2006, as cited in Bailey & Carroll, 2015, p. 278), and thus measure language skill rather than content knowledge. To achieve more accurate accounts of students' progress, schools need multiple summative and formative data sources as part of their assessment systems for ELs.

Summative assessment for ELs: Summative assessments (assessments of learning) are given following instruction, and typically serve as accountability tools to inform teachers, students, and families about EL student progress towards meeting language and academic content standards. Examples of summative assessments used to measure EL learning include state proficiency exams in content learning (e.g., mathematics, science, etc.), language proficiency tests, and teacher-developed unit post-tests. A good deal of research attention has focused on measuring the validity of large-scale summative assessments (whether they measure what they are intending to measure) for capturing EL learning. ELs often have difficulty responding to assessment questions that contain language that is unnecessary or irrelevant to the construct being assessed. Abedi (2006) and others (e.g., Solano-Flores, 2006) have shown that reducing the unnecessary or unrelated linguistic complexity can improve the validity of content-based large-scale summative assessments. Researchers have also examined ways to accommodate ELs within assessment settings to increase the accessibility of academic content assessments, and ensure that EL scores are valid. (Kopriva, et al., 2007). Examples of EL linguistic supports include extra time, simplified English, bilingual dictionaries, glossaries, and

¹ Under ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) schools must report on and show evidence of progress in English language proficiency of their EL students.

² http://ncela.ed.gov/files/fast_facts/OELA_FF_NAEP_LineTrends.pdf

translations; a meta-analysis examining the effectiveness and validity of accommodations for ELs in large-scale assessment found that only dictionaries/glossaries positively impacted test results (Kieffer, Lesaux, Rivera, & Francis, 2009). However, some research has shown that developing performance-based multimodal techniques (e.g., technology-interactive science items) as accommodations for ELs can boost their performance (Thurlow & Kopriva, 2015).

Summative assessments must further demonstrate consequential validity; in other words, they should not result in unintended adverse consequences for students being assessed (Alvarez, et al., 2014). For example, a large-scale content assessment that underestimates an EL student's math ability due to language barriers may result in that student being incorrectly placed in math remediation classes (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2013). English language proficiency (ELP) assessment evidence can keep students in educational programming below their abilities despite evidence of strong performance on other indicators (Estrada & Wang, 2013), limiting their access to higher-level curriculum pathways. ELP exit criteria that are too stringent may be detrimental to EL's performance in mainstream classes (Kim & Herman, 2010).

When administering benchmark assessments, educators must consider not only the language demands required to demonstrate mastery of particular content (Abedi, 2006), but also the timing of these assessments measuring such content, particularly if results are used for summative purposes. Language competencies develop across the school year, and assessments given earlier in the year may unfairly represent students' outcomes if the targeted language competencies necessary for success occur later in the year (Abedi & Linqunti, 2012). Assessment systems must clearly articulate instructional language and content goals and how they correspond to the curriculum content across the school year, and ensure that ELs get appropriate language instruction in the time period covered by the benchmark assessment (Abedi & Linqunti, 2012).

Formative Assessment for ELs: Summative assessment data should not be used to make instructional decisions for individual students, as they are not sensitive enough to provide instructionally relevant data to guide daily classroom decision-making (Heritage, et al., 2013; Means, Padilla, DeBarger, & Bakia, 2009). Formative as-

essment, or assessment for learning, describes the close and frequent monitoring that takes place during instruction (e.g., observing student-to-student talk or regularly conferencing with students about their learning) and the more deliberate classroom assessments of student performance that occur before, during and after instruction (e.g., teacher-made assessments) (Bailey & Carroll, 2015). Formative assessment is the most instructionally relevant form of assessment for ELs (Abedi & Linqunti, 2012; Bailey & Carroll, 2015) because the immediate feedback provides ongoing evidence on language use and content learning, and allows the teacher to make "contingent pedagogical moves" such as scaffolding techniques (Heritage, et al., 2013). Using frequent and varied informal assessment measures to inform instruction is a key variable found in schools that have been successful with ELs (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2010).

Teachers of ELs using formative assessments must simultaneously attend to students' abilities and needs with regard to language proficiency as well as skill and content learning (Alvarez, et al., 2014). Alvarez, et al (2014) suggest that teachers of ELs engage in the following steps when using formative assessment: 1) set learning goals (often in collaboration with students) and success criteria for both language and content; 2) obtain evidence of EL learning (e.g., open-ended tasks that allow multiple ways for students to show learning, such as writing and drawing – these are authentic assessments); and 3) interpret this assessment evidence to inform ongoing instruction (can be teacher-generated or student-generated through self or peer assessment).

Teachers need high-quality professional development to effectively incorporate formative assessment practices (Alvarez, et al., 2014; Heritage, et al., 2013; Santos, Darling-Hammond, & Cheuk, 2012). Whole-school professional development approaches, common planning times for language and content teachers, observations, and coaching are key vehicles for teachers' professional learning on formative assessment (Alvarez, et al., 2014; Bailey & Carroll, 2015; Coleman & Goldenberg, 2010; Heritage, et al, 2013). These approaches to professional learning should address the core learning and language progressions within disciplines so content teachers can understand where their students are within the learning progressions continuum (Santos, et al., 2012). In addition, teachers must learn the language demands needed to understand disciplinary content, and how to provide



appropriate scaffolds and support on the basis of formative assessment.

How can school teams use assessment data in ways that support EL learning?

Schools need to systematically establish and document the processes used for the collection and analysis of all types of EL data—both summative and formative. They also need to continually review and reflect upon how that data can be used to improve EL students' academic outcomes. These data can include results from summative, benchmark, and formative assessments, teacher observations, and samples of students' work from portfolios (Coleman & Goldenberg, 2010). A school's leadership team may establish a data collection and review process to monitor specifically the progress of ELs towards annual and benchmark achievement and language proficiency goals, and then determine school-wide professional development needs based on data analysis. However, as discussed above, this data collection and review process should not be restricted to summative assessment data. Teams should review multiple data sources, particularly the formative data collected by teachers and/or instructional teams. These leadership teams should consist of principals, bilingual and/or ESL teachers, content teachers, special education teachers, and parents (Movit, Petrykowska & Woodruff, 2010). A successful strategy for secondary ELs involves cross-disciplinary school-wide teams focused on a subset of EL students (to include the EL specialist, content area teachers who teach ELs, counselors, and key school administrators) that meet during common planning times to review multiple assessment data sources, align curricula accordingly, and plan cross-curricular projects designed to maximize EL support (Rance-Roney, 2009; Walqui, Koelsch, & Hamburger, 2010). These team structures can ensure that all educators within a school assume shared responsibility for EL achievement (Rance-Roney, 2009).

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Additional Resources

These resources describe a variety of assessment approaches for schools and contain practical resources relevant for EL assessment:

- Bell, T. (2015). *Sample digital monitoring systems*. Silver Spring, MD: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA). Retrieved from http://ncela.ed.gov/les/forms/digital_progress_monitoring.pdf
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