Forum on Addressing Performance Gaps of Low-performing Students: Implications for Assessment and Instruction

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Forum on Addressing Performance Gaps of Low-performing Students:

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Forum on Addressing Performance Gaps of Low-performing Students: Implications for Assessment and Instruction

Background

Sixty-two individuals representing sixteen states, three school districts, eleven testing and testing-related companies, and eleven other organizations participated in a forum on June 19, 2013, in National Harbor, Maryland, to discuss the performance gaps of low-performing students and their implications for assessment and instruction. The forum was a pre-session to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) National Conference on Student Assessment (NCSA), and was a collaboration of the Assessing Special Education Students (ASES) State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS) and the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO).

Purpose

The purpose of the forum on the performance gaps of low-performing students was to address the challenging issues that surround assessment and instruction for these students. In addressing low-performing students, the goal was to realize that the group of students called "low performing" is a diverse group. Many are students with disabilities, and many are English language learners (ELLs). Still, low-performing students are a much broader group – there are many other non-labeled students, who are low performing.

A primary goal of the forum was to provide the opportunity for participants to share perspectives on the topic. The diversity of low-performing students makes it imperative that teams work together to address low-performing students' assessment and instructional needs. As the nation adopts the Common Core State Standards or other 21st century standards and moves toward the implementation of more rigorous assessments of those standards, the challenges of low performance will continue and increase.

The specific focus of the forum was for participants to hear several perspectives on the topic – from state, district, higher education, and parent representatives – and then to discuss the

implications of low-performing students from their own diverse perspectives. Discussion was generated for three groups of low-performing students:

1. Students with disabilities

2. English language learners

3. Other low-performing students

Each of these groups addressed several questions, including:

1. What do we know about these students? What additional information would be helpful?

2. What strategies work to improve outcomes for this group of students? What works? Are different strategies required for this group of students compared to other low-performing students.

3. What is the role of formative measures in improving outcomes for this group of students?

4. With respect to technology, both for instruction and assessment, what should be considered for this group of students?

5. What steps can we take to produce better results? What action steps are needed?

Participants had a limited time for discussion, and discussions were intense. The agenda for the four-hour forum was as follows:

- Welcome (Sandra Warren, CCSSO ASES SCASS)

- Setting the Context (Martha Thurlow, NCEO)

- Panel Perspectives

    - State Level – Melissa Gholson (West Virginia Department of Education)

    - District Level – John Van Pelt (Lake Villa School District, Illinois)

- - Higher Education – Aimee Howley (Ohio University)

    - Parent Representation – Laura Kaloi (Washington Partners, LLC)

  - Discussion Sessions

    - Students with Disabilities (facilitated by Sandra Warren, CCSSO ASES SCASS)

    - English Language Learners (facilitated by Vitaliy Shyyan, NCEO)

    - Other Low-performing Students (facilitated by Anne Chartrand, SERRC)

  - Consensus Process on Action Steps

  - Wrap-up

Structure of This Report

Although this report summarizes the introductory information provided to forum participants, its main purpose is to describe the facilitated forum discussions themselves, and the results of the consensus-building process. Summaries of the discussions were developed from notes taken by notetakers, and action plans were synthesized through the consensus-building process.

This report first summarizes the introductory material provided to participants, and then presents a summary of the points made during each discussion session. In addition, the results of the consensus building process on action steps are presented.

Participants were encouraged to comment and discuss freely, with assurances that no individual's name, nor any state, company, or organization names would be attached to comments that were made. Complete anonymity of statements was assured. This led to frank and open conversations.

Session Introduction

Dr. Sandra Warren, CCSSO ASES SCASS Advisor, provided an overview of the forum and highlighted the goals of the session. She assured participants of the desire for open and

candid conversations, and noted that a report would be produced as a result of the sessions' discussions and consensus-building process.

Setting the Context for Topic Discussions

Dr. Martha Thurlow, NCEO Director, set the context for the afternoon's discussions and consensus-building process. She summarized three factors that highlight the importance of addressing performance gaps. First, federal requirements for reporting on the performance of subgroups will continue to portray the tremendous gaps that exist, making them evident to the public. Reporting on subgroup performance is required by both the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), even as accountability requirements are adjusted. Second, the gaps in performance really do exist, and have been documented not only in state assessments, but also in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Third, the performance gaps have a significant economic impact, for the country and for individual students. Thurlow concluded by noting the findings from multiple projects that confirmed that low-performing students are not just those with disabilities and those who are ELLs, but also those students who have no label. She also highlighted the new federal policy imperative to reduce achievement gaps such as reflected in the flexibility waivers.

Following Thurlow's context setting, four individuals shared their perspectives on low-performing students. In this report, we provide brief summaries of each of the presentations. These are followed by summaries of the discussions of the three topics and the consensus building results.

Melissa Gholson, Coordinator, Office of Assessment and Accountability, West Virginia Department of Education

At the West Virginia Department of Education, Melissa Gholson is a coordinator in the Office of Assessment and Accountability (OAA) responsible for accommodations of special populations on state assessments. She provides data analysis training for districts so that they can address issues raised by assessment results. The Office monitors accommodations and conducts activities related to using assessment data including the implementation of an accommodation

research plan. Gholson conducts accommodations research to identify and address educational needs as well as restructure the assessment and accountability system in general. She is also the alternate assessment coordinator involved in implementing the Common Core State Standards and the Essential Elements. The state's structure will involve using the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium assessment for students following the Common Core and the Dynamic Learning Maps alternate assessment for students following the Essential Elements. The Common Core State Standards are for all students and the Essential Elements are part of the standards. The state provides scaffolding to educators at different levels.

Gholson reported that West Virginia developed a three-step process for accommodations composed of training on the participation guidelines, electronic accommodations monitoring process, and data research. The state collects specific data on the use of accommodations for students with disabilities and ELL students, and these data prove to be very informative. State-, district-, and school-level reports are generated and shared with all teachers. The reports contain the numbers of students who received accommodations and those who were not provided accommodations they were supposed to get. The data analysis showed that a number of students were over-accommodated and led to the development of procedures to address accommodation policies. The state has done a lot of work on appropriate accommodating policies and practices for students. The analysis helps the state identify which districts need technical assistance related to accommodations. One outcome of reviewing the data is an increased attention to greater accuracy in the domain of accommodations.

John Van Pelt, Superintendent, Lake Villa Public Schools, Illinois

Lake Villa Public Schools is located north of Chicago, IL, and has approximately 3,000 students. The district's demographics are changing, with an increase in minority students, particularly Hispanic students. The district has been featured in the work of *Moving Your Numbers* as a district that has achieved some success in improving outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities.

Van Pelt reported that the district has an extensive accountability framework with 11 indicators. Each school is aligned with the district plan that targets professional development and

monitoring the implementation of key initiatives. The district leadership stresses communicating progress toward meeting the goals and this progress is communicated periodically in newsletters and twice a year in public meetings.

The district developed learning teams to implement the accountability plan. These learning teams are the glue that holds the district's system together. A district-wide curriculum has been implemented that replaced the many different types of curriculum previously used. In addition, the district added data-driven professional learning communities. This process involved a shift from teaching to learning – a focus on results. The collaborative structure is similar for all learning teams. Principals are part of this process and the central office staff also makes impromptu visits to team meetings. The team meetings are involved in designing, implementing, and monitoring the curriculum. Common formative assessments guide the learning team process and interventions are initiated when students are not making satisfactory progress.

Professional development initiatives include professional learning communities, classroom walk-throughs, common formative assessments, and data teams. Response to Intervention (RTI) is an integral part of the whole learning team process. Significant progress has occurred from 2003 to the present, Van Pelt reported, but he added that he believes there is still too large a gap between students with disabilities and other students. Van Pelt noted the gap is being reduced.

Van Pelt emphasized that in order to improve outcomes for students in the gap, the focus must be at the full district level with no more than 3-5 goals and limited action steps focusing on a few things at a time. Interventions must be embedded and resources targeted to get results. Teams must meet at least two times each month for an hour. Lake Villa learning teams meet 90 minutes each week throughout the school year. Implementation of initiatives must be made with fidelity and receive a high level of ongoing support.

Aimee Howley, Senior Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies, College of Education, Ohio University

Dr. Aimee Howley reported that while she learned a lot about teaching in her preparation program, she gained so much more knowledge and experience on the actual job. Teacher preparation is not facing an easy set of tasks, but it is not doing as much as is possible at this time. Howley noted that students are low performing because teachers are not doing what they need to do.

Nevertheless, according to Howley, teacher preparation is better than no teacher education as a way to develop teachers who meet the needs of low-performing students. A four-year program, according to Howley, is better than a program that is only one or two summers in length. But four-year programs face certain obstacles. Accreditation standards, for example, are now less focused on social justice – they tend to make teacher preparation for working with low-performing students into a technical matter of differentiation rather and an issue of ethical practice. Nevertheless, the social justice umbrella is the reason for intensive teacher preparation programs – students deserve to be able to learn at the highest levels. This is the *why* of teacher preparation programs, but those programs do not have enough of the *how to*. Professional education faculty members, while often committed to social justice, do not necessarily stay in touch with the world of practice. Rewarding and incentivizing faculty does not include being out in the field with working teachers. Curriculum issues tend to be dealt with in programmatic silos – it makes inclusion of all students a difficult matter. Ohio is trying to engage higher education people and teachers with one another to think about how to help the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) support effective and inclusive teaching practice. There are some ODE grants to provide seed funding for innovative models. The three themes are collaboration, dispositions (perspective or attitudes about practice), and partnerships.

Laura Kaloi, Washington Partners, LLC, Washington, DC

Laura Kaloi works as a consultant at Washington Partners, LLC. Previously, she worked for the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD). Kaloi is also a parent.

NCLD is very passionate about helping students succeed in school. NCLD wants students with learning disabilities to graduate with a regular diploma, enter college or participate in career training, and have the opportunity for a good job. *Specific learning disabilities* is not a term for

all students with disabilities – it is a specific group and one of the thirteen disability categories under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). About 85% of students identified in the thirteen disability categories do not have a cognitive disability. Statistics on graduation with a diploma vary widely across the country – students with disabilities graduate at a 56% rate as compared to 77% of their general education peers.

Kaloi explained that perception affects policy – most members of Congress and the public believe that students with disabilities cannot achieve on grade level and gain a regular diploma. There is also misinformation among the public about testing – some teachers think they should be able to give an alternate assessment to as many students as they want. Alternate assessments are limited to only those students with significant cognitive disabilities, and this is a very small percentage of the population of students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities can thrive when they are held to the same high expectations as their peers and provide the instruction, intervention, and support they need. These students need to be included in all reform efforts as well as innovative education, including charter schools and virtual learning. Kaloi posed the question, what will charter schools and virtual learning mean for students with disabilities?

Kaloi concluded with key issues facing education policy and students with learning disabilities. ESEA reauthorization and the Common Core implementation are two critical issues at this time. Parent advocates are watching developments and trying to be part of the conversation on these issues.

Addressing Performance Gaps of Low-Performing Students with Disabilities

A large group of state and district educators, parents, and testing company representatives participated in the discussion on addressing performance gaps of low-performing students with disabilities. Participants raised many issues as they discussed the questions posed to the group, but also indicated that there are concrete steps that can be taken to address the low performance of students with disabilities. The group's discussion focused on what we know about low-performing students with disabilities, and what we still need to know, the strategies that appear to work with these students, the role of formative measures in improving their outcomes, and the steps that can be taken to produce better results.

What do we know about low-performing students with disabilities already?

Discussion in response to this question focused on both the characteristics of the students, including changes in characteristics over time, and the nature of their instruction. In addition to noting that students in this group have a documented disability, the participants made the following points:

- They may or may not have had instruction aligned to standards.
- The number of eligible students is dropping every year, particularly for students with learning disabilities; this is known nationally, but numbers can vary significantly across states.
- The availability of support services is lagging behind the current known knowledge. Due to Response to Intervention (RTI) approaches, more students are receiving better instruction; still there is a long way to go.
- In many schools, there is a mismatch between Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and what actually happens in the classroom. In addition, too often, we still see the same accommodations for all students in a school district.

What do we want to know (what additional information would be helpful)?

As the participants commented on the characteristics of low-performing students with disabilities, they also noted that additional information is needed to better understand this group of students. Among the comments made were:

- We still need to understand the nuances of this very diverse group and turn our focus to access needs rather than disabilities and accommodations. This will help us to provide more thoughtful interventions.
- We also need to focus on student abilities and strengths rather than disabilities.
- We need to use the correct language.

What strategies appear to work with low-performing students with disabilities?

Participants had many thoughts and comments about strategies that appear to work for low-performing students with disabilities. They ranged from professional development to opportunity to learn to specific approaches to setting goals. Specific comments included:

- Identify strategies that work with students with disabilities to improve the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. This could in turn improve their outcomes.
- Encourage students to find ownership in the classroom, rather than them feeling like they are just a piece of the location.
- When determining IEP goals, allow students to set goals for themselves rather than telling them what is right for them.
- When mismatches are determined between instruction and assessments, try to involve the students so that they can independently tell you what needs to be changed.
- Include special education teachers in general education trainings and in-services.
- Provide everyone with equal access to inclusion, collaboration, learning communities, and Common Core State Standards.
- Hold high expectations for all students even if culturally there are none, especially when it comes to academics.
- Give each student the opportunity to learn. Even if they are not at the same grade level as the other students there needs to be a more efficient way to guide students to grade level.
- Provide teacher trainings and tools for ways to align instruction with grade level standards. Common Core State Standards are a good start for working with students with disabilities. This will allow for a deeper and more intense level to be able to learn a subject.
- It is more important to have a time-based paradigm rather than a competency-based paradigm.

What is the role of formative measures in improving outcomes for low-performing students with disabilities?

Participants commented on the important role of formative measures in improving outcomes for low-performing students with disabilities. The importance of collaboration received considerable emphasis in the discussion.

- To help better understand the notion of growth and what it looks like during a particular time period, formative and interim measures need to be used.

- Interim assessment helps predict summative assessments. Looking at fall-to-spring growth will help teachers judge growth over a longer period of time.
- Looking at all the data special educators use can easily become overwhelming. There needs to be more knowledge of what each data set can be used for.
- Developing IEPs online could help teachers align instruction with certain goals.
- Collaboration is important to each student whether in regular or special education. Making this collaboration more regular would help improve each child's success.
- While formative assessment is used for professional development there needs to be an extensive part of it that should be used for other data sources. We need to take a closer look at the learning progressions. A more thorough look can help us see all the layers of where teachers have to go.
- It is worth looking at staff for their strengths and weaknesses to develop individualized professional development.
- Using short formative assessments that are more frequent and embedded in already established instruction would be more useful. Having it embedded into instruction allows students' making mistakes to be perceived as a learning process, which gives them more strength to want to correct their errors. When a formative assessment is administered through a district-wide assessment, students do not notice the mistake as an error and are not so quick to adjust it.
- Surveying students not only allows them to be integrated in their learning but to see where each student did not do as well. We need to limit the survey to 5-10 questions so it is easy and not too overwhelming for all the students.
- Teachers need to be prepared before they go into the classroom with gaps such as lack of knowledge about how to develop communication system in students with significant disabilities. While many special educators are trained in certain areas some do not know the content. This means they know about reading skills but have a hard time teaching reaching skills to support reading instruction.
- There is a need for self-advocacy for students to know how they can improve their learning experiences.

With respect to technology, both for instruction and assessment, what should be considered for low-performing students with disabilities?

Participants addressed this question as they discussed steps to produce better results. Although intertwined, the participants were emphatic about one point related to technology:

- There is a need to think about how the new technology-based world (in which anyone can listen to text read to them via a computer, tablet, and numerous other devices) will affect our thinking about literacy. It was noted that blind and visually impaired students need access to literacy via braille, not just audio accessibility.

What steps can we take to produce better results for low-performing students with disabilities? What action steps are needed?

In concluding their discussion, participants addressed the steps that might be taken to produce better results for low-performing students with disabilities. The rich discussion identified several action steps.

- Research to develop ways to partner with higher education to help policy makers and others know how to use the data that are collected.
- Formative assessment needs to be adjusted to be more useful for schools and students so that there can be a dialogue about the data. This can be achieved by requiring teachers to report and allowing teachers to work together to develop more consistent rubric for writing samples.
- Policy needs to focus on students who are blind/visually impaired when there is no access for this group of students.
- The results-driven accountability initiative is important. There is a need to shift away from sole focus on compliance monitoring. There is also a need for some accountability for the outcomes. Departments of education are responsible for implementing such accountability efforts.
- Supports that are available at the high school level are not available at the college level, even with ADA and Section 504. This mechanism will assist in allowing students who have already dropped out to regain access to school again. Although currently states are not encouraged to help students get back in school or continue their studies because of the graduation rate policy that counts only students who graduate with a regular diploma in 4 years. Having multiple diploma options has a negative correlation with the graduation rate. It seems that by adding the term *diploma* to an option, rates go down even more.
- There are several questions that need to be addressed. Should we allow schools to choose to have the path or eliminate the alternative paths altogether? The input for this decision needs to be based on how the students would get the certification and whether it should count in a system at the federal legislative level. Should there be different ways of getting diplomas – one for career readiness and one for college readiness, and what research is there to back the need for different degrees? While thinking in this direction, should there be credits a student can get when taking courses at a post-secondary institution? Would this option start a pathway leading to some type of credit? Many students can be successful without getting a high school diploma.
- Race to the Top (RTTT) states are encouraged to institute innovative programs for students to take college credit classes in high school, but how can we be sure that students with disabilities are included in this? There are concerns about what some of high school diploma requirements (e.g., end-of-course assessments) mean for students with disabilities and how they affect graduation requirements.

Addressing Performance Gaps of Low-Performing
English Language Learners

Educators from a number of states representing various institutions and organizations participated in a discussion on issues related to instruction and assessment of low-performing English language learners (ELLs). This group's discussion focused on the questions of ELLs' needs and characteristics (both well-known and those that require further research), strategies for improving educational outcomes for this group of students, implications of formative measures of such improvements, technology implementation and use, and action steps that would lead to better educational results for ELLs.

What do we know about low-performing ELLs already?

Responses to this question centered on student characteristics and educational implications for this student population. A representative of one state reported a significant increase in the population of Spanish-speaking students who can neither read nor write in their first language. According to the representative, this trend has had extensive implications for the state's policymakers and practitioners in the ELL domain. An educator from another state commented on a correlational relationship between student language abilities and support from professionals and paraprofessionals. Often schools face the challenge of not being able to communicate in students' native languages. Other information generated by this question was:

- In reading instruction, context is important. Vocabulary used in isolation does not render the desired meaning.
- ELL students often represent a diverse spectrum, their population is heterogeneous.
- Many ELLs are born in the United States.
- Although Spanish often constitutes the largest language group, ELLs also represent many other language groups across the country.
- ELLs fit into multiple gap groups/subgroups.

What do we want to know about low-performing ELLs (what additional information would be helpful)?

Further discussion transitioned into considerations of what additional information would be instrumental for ELL instruction and assessment. The following were the generated questions:

- What are some emerging best practices, particularly in the context of standards-based education? How can we disseminate these? What does best practice mean (perhaps illustrated through video clips)? What are some ways of sharing teacher action research – learning from what is working in specific places and informing broader community?

- What are strategies for increasing parent involvement (especially if parents cannot speak English)?
- How do we accommodate cultures that have varying values regarding education overall?
- How are instructional strategies different for ELLs who are at 1 or 2 level of proficiency compared to those at 3 or 4? How do we ensure that we are addressing all levels of proficiency?
- How do we offer extensive professional development for teachers of ELLs to maximize return on investment and facilitate student growth?
- What kinds of language-reduced, linguistically-appropriate standards-based assessments (outside of alternate assessments) are available in the field?
- How do we leverage technology in the best possible way and infuse technology as much as we should or could?

What strategies appear to work with low-performing ELLs?

Session participants also discussed strategies of improving outcomes for low-performing ELLs. Special attention was paid to strategies required for ELLs as different from strategies for other low-performing students. One state delegate reported that although their state is not formally bilingual, they still need support from those who can speak ELLs' native languages. Also, having people from other cultures in administrative leadership roles (e.g., principal) inspires students to achieve. A representative of another state shared about having a transitional high school program that supports students who might need more time to graduate. The following additional strategies and approaches were mentioned:

- WIDA approach (describing things in academic language perspective, e.g., describing a building from various perspectives (architect, builder, etc.).
- Content-based language instruction.
- Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model.
- What works for ELLs is helping other low-performing students (according to Teachers' Academy).

What is the role of formative measures in improving outcomes for low-performing ELLs?

Educators also discussed the role of formative assessment measures of improving outcomes for ELLs. These are the suggestions that were provided:

- NAEP provides test items organized from easiest to most difficult. This approach entails identifying where students currently are and building their knowledge based on that information.
- At the school level, WIDA formative assessment rubrics help address what might be used for ELLs.
- One state used district-created formative assessments developed with university assistance.

- The Dana Center (www.utdanacenter.org) research at the community college level explores what ELL students (and other struggling learners) need in their transition. This could inform the in-school practice prior to moving to postsecondary settings and help foster successful transitions.

With respect to technology, both for instruction and assessment, what should be considered for low-performing ELLs?

Another question focused on technology, both for instruction and assessment. Participants were asked about technological tools that should be considered for this group of students. The following information was provided:

- Access to technology is important. Factors to consider are whether ELLs own or have access to computers and the internet at home and how much time they spend on those computers.
- Certain languages are privileged by *Google Translate* and similar products, and these limitations need to be considered.
- Some consortia are limited in the languages they include in their computer assessments.
- Translation cannot guarantee that the student is getting the assessment in an appropriate manner. Students' literacy in their native languages is a factor under these circumstances as well.
- Online assessments were reported to provide a moral boost for students in one state.
- "Plan B" considerations are needed for situations, in which some languages are not supported by consortia's assessments.
- Each assessment consortium needs to make decisions and collaborate with others on accommodations for ELLs, particularly the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (www.parcconline.org) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (www.smarterbalanced.org), but the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System Consortium (dynamiclearningmaps.org) and the National Center and State Collaborative (www.ncscpartners.org) as well.
- A place for all the information about what works should be available to anyone looking for best practices is needed. The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) is a useful resource.

What steps can we take to product better results for low-performing ELLs? What action steps are needed?

Finally, session participants were asked to identify action steps that can be taken to produce better results for ELLs. The following steps were listed:

- Be able to assess everyone. Ensure that assessment items are written at the different levels so you can *get at* every level.
- Ensure access to best practices regardless of geographic location (or other differences).

- Collaborate with business community, higher education, and other organizations to ensure readiness and effective transition to postsecondary opportunities.
- Develop navigation skills for ELLs in the world of learning.
- Focus increasingly on ELL issues and overcoming challenges that students face; get more people involved.
- Make ELLs a priority so that resources are allocated at the federal/state/local levels and in the private sector, to clearly define policies.
- Improve research so we can better address the issues particular to ELLs; develop a research agenda; and recognize existing research and develop and disseminate a meta-analysis.
- Review and synthesize the comments made on reauthorization of ESEA.
- Develop common definitions (e.g., *exiting*).
- Allocate time and financial resources to assist parents and teachers in addressing culturally-appropriate ways to support families and their students.
- Track trends among ELLs and their experience and progress (e.g., longitudinal studies, examination of the data already collected). One state reported using their data to identify goals, on which to focus for this population. The goals were limited to three, so that they might be attainable and manageable in a plan; educators explored what they wanted to know. The state helped districts review data and apply strategies appropriately – sometimes by getting the district to change its practice to address the issues revealed through the data analysis.

Addressing Performance Gaps of Other Low-Performing Students

Some students may be low performing, but not necessarily classified as students with disabilities or English language learners. Participants in this group brought district, state, and national perspectives to the discussion on issues related to instruction and assessment of other low-performing students. This group's discussion focused on the questions of needs and characteristics (both well-known and those that require further research), strategies for improving educational outcomes for this group of students, implications of formative measures of such improvements, technology implementation and use, and action steps that would lead to better educational results for all students.

What do we know about other low-performing students already? What do we want to know about other low-performing students (what additional information would be helpful)?

The first part of the discussion focused on what participants already know about other low-performing students. The discussion affirmed that many students who are low performing, and who may be taking an alternate assessment based on modified achievement standards may not be special education students. Participants shared examples from their educational contexts:

- Some schools have high populations of students taking an AA-MAS.
- Sometimes, poverty may be a factor but this is not always the case.
- Schools and parents must work together; it is important for schools to value the student's home culture.
- In Singapore, students are grouped based on need, and a tracking system is used after primary school.
- There are forthcoming changes in the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) to align it to the Common Core State Standards, and these changes will have an impact on low-performing students.

What strategies appear to work with other low-performing students?

The group discussion shifted to focus on the strategies to improve outcomes for other low-performing students. The group discussed strategies in terms of both policies and instructional approaches. Key discussion points included the following:

- More instructional time is needed for this group of students.
- Understanding the learning progressions of this group of students (they may not all learn to read by 3rd grade) is important for this group of students' success.
- District leadership changes frequently and can have a significant impact on the success of students and teachers.

What is the role of formative measures in improving outcomes for other low-performing students?

In terms of formative measures, the group thought that an important goal is not allowing students to experience failure. Teachers and schools face increasing pressure and added challenges. Some key approaches the group discussed include the following:

- Balancing incentives for teachers so that their salaries are not closely tied to student achievement.
- Encouraging the use of differentiated instruction.
- Limiting the use of ability grouping, which may lead to rote learning and low expectations.
- Ensuring fair distribution of resources among schools in a district.

With respect to technology, both for instruction and assessment, what should be considered for other low-performing students?

The group discussed the importance of technology, but acknowledged that it cannot be compensation for poor instruction. When used appropriately, technology can assist and improve learning outcomes for this group of students.

What steps can we take to produce better results? What action steps are needed?

Finally, the group considered action steps that are needed to improve results for low-performing students who are not in special education and are not English language learners. The group emphasized the importance of leadership and high expectations for all students. Key action steps mentioned included the following:

- Individualize instruction, potentially using technology.
- Invest in strong leadership.
- Implement consistent and effective curriculum.
- Replicate resources currently given to advanced students to all students.

Consensus Building and Action Steps

The Multi-Attribute Consensus Building (MACB) process was employed to enable participants to discuss the action steps they generated during the breakout sessions and attempt to reach consensus on their perceptions of importance of each step. The MACB method is a quantitative approach for determining a group's opinion about the importance of each variable (in this case, each action step) on a list. Detailed information about the MACB process is available on the NCEO website at: http://www.nceo.info/Tools/MACBtool.pdf.

Dr. Vitaliy Shyyan (NCEO) administered the MACB process by inviting all groups of participants to discuss and weigh the importance of each action step at their tables using the following MACB scale: 1-20 – very unimportant, 21-40 – unimportant, 41-60 – neither unimportant nor important, 61-80 – important, 81-100 – very important. Each group was asked to assign a 100 weighting to at least one action step and compare the importance of the remaining steps to the top selected item(s). After all groups finished discussing and generating their weightings, each group was asked to report its weightings for each action step. The weightings were instantly entered into an MACB spreadsheet visible to all participants. The spreadsheet automatically calculated ranges, overall proportional weights, and importance averages for each action step. These findings were subsequently discussed in a large group format with an emphasis on the action steps that received more varied weightings. If members of any group preferred, they were able to change any of their weightings at any point during the general discussion if they were convinced by the other participants of a different level of importance of a given action step.

Table 1 summarizes the results of the MACB process. According to the table, most action steps were weighted as very important. The following action steps received the highest average importance weightings: require program level accountability for student outcomes; invest in strong leadership, consistent/effective curriculum, etc.; and understand the data to know the trajectory of students.

Table 1. MACB Results: Importance of Action Steps

#	Action Step	Range of Weightings	Proportional Weight	Average of Weightings
1	Clarify college readiness versus career readiness	61-100	0.16	84
2	Understand the data to know the trajectory of students	85-100	0.17	92
3	Ensure access to assistive technology	85-100	0.17	90
4	Ensure integrity of regular diploma and alternative pathways	75-90	0.16	84
5	Require program level accountability for student outcomes	90-100	0.18	96
6	Write test items at different levels to show all student performance	70-100	0.16	84
7	Ensure access to best practices regardless of geographic location	80-100	0.17	89
8	Collaborate with business community and higher education	70-90	0.15	80
9	Make ELLs a resource allocation priority at all levels	70-95	0.16	83
10	Improve research so that we can better address ELL issues	60-95	0.15	80
11	Identify resources to support stakeholders in addressing culturally appropriate support	65-85	0.14	76
12	Individualize instruction more successfully, technology can help	75-100	0.16	87
13	Invest in strong leadership, consistent/effective curriculum, etc.	80-100	0.18	93
14	Replicate resources currently given to advanced students to all students	75-90	0.16	83