

Including English Learners With Disabilities in Assessments

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- **Assessment data are used to make important decisions about programming, instruction, and services that English learners with disabilities receive.**
- **Ensuring that assessment data are meaningful requires that English learners with disabilities first have well-designed, grade-level standards-based instruction with appropriate and individualized accommodations for language learning and disability.**
- **To have the greatest impact, individualized accessibility features and accommodations a student uses on an assessment should be similar to what the student uses in class. Accessibility features and accommodations should address both language-learning and disability-related needs.**
- **A well-trained Individualized Education Program (IEP) team that includes an English language development specialist is the key to making good assessment participation decisions for these students. Parents of English learners will need to be supported so they understand the IEP process and can participate.**

Key words: English Learners With Disabilities, Assessment, Accessibility, Accommodations.

English learners are a growing part of the population of students with disabilities in the United States. As their numbers have increased, so has the awareness of policy makers and educators about their diversity and the educational needs of those English learners who also have disabilities.

English learners and students with disabilities, as separate groups, have been recognized for some time in federal law in relation to their participation in and performance on state assessments. When the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was reauthorized in 1994, it specifically required that both of these groups be included in state standards-based assessments and that their scores be reported. In the 2001 reauthorization of ESEA, the former Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was replaced by Title III, partly in response to *Lau v. Nichols* and the Equal Opportunity Act. Title III Part A, now known as the English Language Acquisition, Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act, has a focus on meeting academic content standards and gaining English language proficiency (ELP). The 2015 reauthorization of ESEA heightened awareness of English learners when states were required to include their performance and growth in state accountability

systems and to report on these disaggregated by disability status.

Even before the passage of ESEA 2015, there was evidence of the increased awareness and growing interest in English learners with disabilities. For example, in the toolkit initially developed in 2014 by the Office of English Language Acquisition (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), chapter 6 specifically addressed English learners with disabilities. After the initial draft of the toolkit, but before the 2015 reauthorization of ESEA, the Office of Civil Rights together with the U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education (2015b) released a fact sheet titled “Ensuring English Learner Students Can Participate Meaningfully and Equally in Educational Programs.” It included four points about English learners and special education. One of the points was that English learners with disabilities must be provided both the language assistance and disability-related services to which they are entitled under federal law. Another point it made was that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team should include individuals knowledgeable about the student’s language needs to ensure that the language-related needs of the English learner with

disabilities were addressed in the IEP. To further clarify the responsibilities of state departments, districts, and schools, the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education (2015a) jointly developed a “Dear Colleague” letter on English learners and their parents who might have limited English skills.

Since that time, the U.S. Department of Education (2016) has provided guidance on implementing Title III as amended by the reauthorization of ESEA in 2015. This guidance reinforced the requirements that states report on the progress of English learners disaggregated by English learners with disabilities and data on former English learners also disaggregated by English learners with disabilities. It encouraged states, districts, and schools to disaggregate data in this way for students who had not attained ELP within 5 years of initial classification as a basis for informing “program planning, staff professional development, and instructional decision-making” (p. 41). Although the guidance indicated that funds were available to develop an alternate ELP assessment “for certain English learners with disabilities who cannot take the regular English language proficiency assessment with accommodations” (p. 9), it did not provide further guidance on alternate ELP assessments.

Additional information about assessing English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities and their IEPs emerged in an Office of Special Education Programs (2021) policy letter. This letter clarified that the IEP team “should include participants who have the requisite knowledge or special expertise regarding the student’s language needs” (p. 3) for all English learners, including those who participate in the alternate ELP assessment.

Researchers and technical assistance providers were quick to help clarify how states could meet the needs of English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities. For example, researchers described the characteristics of English learners who participated in states’ content assessments (Christensen et al., 2018; Karvonen & Clark, 2019), and technical assistance providers suggested early approaches to including English learners with significant cognitive disabilities (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2014), summarized what the literature says about literacy assessment and instruction practice for English learners with significant cognitive disabilities (Liu et al., 2020), and provided a framework for making decisions about

participation in states’ alternate ELP assessments (Liu et al., 2021).

Despite these efforts, little is known about the assessment participation and performance of this group of students. For example, in states’ public reports for school year 2018–2019 (Albus et al., 2021), only five states reported any data for English learners with disabilities for Title I assessments. For states’ alternate assessments, more states (but still only 16) reported any data (11 reported participation and performance for all of their alternate assessments).

In this article, we address the inclusion of English learners with disabilities, including those with significant cognitive disabilities, in state and district assessments. We provide background information on who these students are and the relationship between academic English language development, content learning, and assessment. We highlight the importance of having good assessment data on English learners with disabilities and how to collect these data, as well as the role of the IEP team in assessment decisions for English learners with disabilities. We conclude by discussing how administrators can support the appropriate inclusion of English learners with disabilities in assessments and the interpretation of their results.

Who Are English Learners With Disabilities?

English learners with disabilities represent an increasingly larger segment of the K–12 student population in the United States. Because of the interaction of their disability and second-language learning processes, these students have unique learning needs that affect both teaching and the way students show what they have learned. Generally speaking, an English learner with a disability is a student who is eligible for both special education services and English as a second language or bilingual education services. Processes for the identification of a student in need of special education services and a student who is eligible for English language development services are different and may differ across states, thereby creating variability in the definition of “English learner with disabilities” across the country.

Data from the U.S. Department of Education (2011, 2020), Child Count and Educational Environments, across 50 states and the District of

Columbia (D.C.) indicated that there were 522,966 English learners with disabilities aged 6 to 21 years in 2012–2013 and 736,078 English learners with disabilities in 2019–2020. The percentage of English learners in the population of students with disabilities increased by 2.4 percentage points, from 9.2% in 2012–2013 to 11.6% in 2019–2020. The average change for states with valid data (48 states and D.C.) was 25.8% in 2019–2020. However, the percentage change varied across states. It ranged from decreasing more than 53% in Oregon to increasing 243% in Illinois since 2012–2013. Thirty-five states reported that the percentage of English learners in the population of students with disabilities increased more than 30% from 2012–2013 to 2019–2020, with 11 states reporting a significant increase of more than 100%. During this time, 43 of 48 states with valid data between 2012–2013 and 2019–2020 reported that the number of English learners with disabilities rose, with the greatest increases occurring in Illinois (243%), Mississippi (173%), Rhode Island (141%), Kansas (135%), and D.C. (132%).

According to the Office of Special Education Programs (2022), English learners were more likely to be identified with a specific learning disability and speech-language impairment and less likely to be identified with other health impairment, autism, and emotional disturbance compared with all school-aged students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B. *Table 1* summarizes the *Fast Facts* data on categories of students with disabilities who are English learners, 5–21 years old (school age). The most recent data available from the Office of English Language Acquisition (2019) indicate that the top four languages spoken by English learners in the United States during the 2016–2017 school year were Spanish (76.4%), followed by Arabic (2.5%), Chinese (1.9%), and Vietnamese (1.3%). These were the only languages accounting for more than 1% of the total population of school-age English learners in the United States.

Federal legislation requires that English learners with suspected disabilities be evaluated in both their native language and English to ensure that any difficulties with learning are evident in both languages and are not solely the result of natural second-language learning processes. Educators and schools report that providing appropriate special education evaluations in two languages and differentiating language learning from

Table 1: Percentage of 2020–2021 school-age students with disabilities who were English learners by selected disability categories

Disability category	Students with disabilities overall	English learners with disabilities
Specific learning disability	34.56	44.69
Speech or language impairment	17.63	18.93
Other health impairment	16.35	9.23
Autism	11.44	9.75
Intellectual disability	6.09	6.76
Emotional disturbance	5.15	1.91

Note. Data in this table are from the *OSEP Fast Facts* (2022) bar graph titled “Percentage of Students with Disabilities who are EL, Ages 5 (School Age) through 21, by Disability Category, in the US, Outlying Areas, and Freely Associated States: SY 2020-21.” The source of data for that graph was cited as U.S. Department of Education, EDData Warehouse (EDW): “IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments Collection,” 2020-21. <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/71ca7d0c-a161-4abe-9e2b-4e68ffb1061a/resource/c515f168-be9c-4505-a6d7-d52a47b9b2b7/download/bchildcountandedenvironment2020-21.csv>. Totals do not add up to 100% due to not including all disability categories in this visualization.

language-related disabilities can be challenging (Counts et al., 2018). As a result, there are concerns about the accuracy of special education identification rates for English learners. These concerns are heightened for English learners in some racial or ethnic groups.

Relationship Between Academic English Language Development, Content Learning, and Assessment for English Learners With Disabilities

To be successful at school, English learners, including those with disabilities, need to learn two broad types of English language skills. The first is social English skills. This is the oral and written language of everyday communication. It may be used in informal conversations between educators and students (e.g., a teacher’s direction about how to walk down the hallway), between peers in the classroom (e.g.,

chatting about a sports event), at lunch (e.g., inviting friends to eat together), and on the playground (e.g., discussing the rules of a game). Students who are new to English often pick up this type of language relatively quickly by being immersed in language-rich situations. Children can appear to be skilled in social English before they have learned the second type of English skills that are critical to school success: those in academic English. Academic English can be more abstract, with complicated sentence structures, long sentences, and content-specific vocabulary. Academic English may be used in classroom materials and reflected in the way teachers talk during instruction. Academic English is also a key feature of assessments, particularly large-scale assessments of mathematics, reading/language arts, science, and other disciplines.

English learners need to be taught academic English so that they can fully engage with, and make progress in, the grade-level standards-based curriculum. The academic English that a state has determined is essential for English learners to be successful in the classroom is identified in English proficiency standards. To illustrate this interrelationship between content and academic English proficiency, consider an example state Grade 4 math standard and a related English proficiency standard.

Math

Use place-value understanding and properties of operations to perform multidigit arithmetic.

- Estimate differences: word problems

English proficiency: Reading

Identify key terms to determine the order of operations in a shared reading of a story problem.

The state's ELP standard for reading identifies a language-related skill English learners must be able to perform in order to achieve the math standard of estimating differences in word problems. In short, they need to be able to identify key vocabulary in a word problem that suggests the types of mathematical calculations they need to perform in a math story problem (e.g., adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing) and the order in which to perform those calculations (e.g., multiplying first, then subtracting). To be successful in fourth-grade math in this state, English learners also need instruction in this and other academic English

proficiency standards. They will require linguistic supports in the mathematics classroom such as well-designed instructional activities that allow students multiple ways to take in information and respond (see guidelines for Universal Design for Learning by CAST, 2018), activities focused on building academic vocabulary, and simplification of linguistically dense mathematics textbook passages. Individual students may require additional supports, depending on their characteristics and needs.

When English learners, including those with disabilities, take the state assessment, creators of test items typically assume the student has command of the key academic vocabulary that should be part of instruction. An example of a Grade 4 state mathematics assessment item illustrates this point:

Greg buys 21 bags of nails. Each bag has 85 nails in it. Greg rounds both numbers to the nearest ten to find an estimate of the total number of nails. What is the difference between Greg's estimate of the total number of nails and the actual total number of nails?

(Excerpted from the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment Mathematics Item and Scoring Sampler, <https://www.education.pa.gov/Documents/K-12/Assessment%20and%20Accountability/PSSA/Item%20and%20Scoring%20Samples/2019%20PSSA%20ISS%20Math%20Grade%204.pdf>)

To answer this type of word problem correctly, a fourth-grade English learner needs to know how to do basic math calculations and much more. The student needs to know key academic English vocabulary terms specific to math, such as: *rounds*, *nearest ten*, *estimate*, *total number*, and *difference*. In addition, the student needs to read and comprehend complex English sentences as well as identify the terms that indicate which mathematical function to perform. In addition, there are some everyday English vocabulary words the student needs to know, such as *nails* and *bags*, in order for the problem to make sense. If a student does not have the requisite English skills to understand and answer the problem, the resulting response from the student will not reflect their math knowledge but rather will be an indicator of their English proficiency and their English language development. An English learner may be able to receive a testing accessibility feature or accommodation such as having math test items read aloud and extra time. However, depending on the assessment and the standards, students may not be able to receive assistance with key math vocabulary.

To illustrate this, here is an example. Maryam, a fourth-grade English learner, comes from an Arabic-speaking family. She arrived in the United States 6 months ago and is beginning to learn English. Her father is a carpenter, and she has had direct experience with bags of nails and estimating amounts of construction materials in Arabic. She went with her father on shopping trips in her home country and heard him estimate the amounts of needed supplies for a project. Maryam has had consistent math instruction, in Arabic, in her home country and is a good reader for her grade level in Arabic. Maryam knows the math concepts in Arabic, she just has not learned the English skills to show what she knows. On the state math assessment this year, Maryam can have math items read aloud. This accessibility feature is available for all students. Her teachers know she will need to understand key math terms in English and have designed some instructional activities to help her build this knowledge. Maryam might not be able to get this particular word problem correct this year. However, with appropriate supports in class and good instruction, as well as appropriate accessibility features and accommodations on math tests, her teachers feel confident that she will gain the English skills she needs to show what she knows.

In this example, Maryam is a child without a disability. For an English learner with a disability, the interrelationship of content knowledge, academic English proficiency, and assessment can be even more complex. Some students may have a disability that does not affect their language development directly (e.g., a physical disability). For these students, their English language development reflects more typical processes of language learning. With good instruction and appropriate classroom and testing supports, they can be expected to progress and exit English language development programs in a period of several years. They will have the English skills they need to function in the grade-level content curriculum and on assessments.

For an English learner with a disability, the interrelationship of content knowledge, academic English proficiency, and assessment can be even more complex.

Other English learners may have a disability that does affect how the child processes and produces language (e.g., language-based learning disability, some forms of autism, intellectual disability, significant cognitive disabilities). These students can be expected to learn English and have the same need for good English instruction and appropriate supports as their peers with disabilities that do not affect language development. However, because of their disability, they may continue to experience ongoing challenges with both first language and English language development. For example, Lin is an English learner from a Chinese-speaking home who has a significant cognitive disability and a visual impairment. He relies on multimodal communication using a few spoken or written words in both Chinese and English, an assistive communication device programmed in English, and possibly gestures such as pointing. To be successful in the math classroom and to be able to show what he knows on a large-scale math assessment, Lin will need more than the usual supports for English learners. Lin will also need accessibility features and accommodations that are described in his IEP, such as access to the assistive communication device for instruction and assessment, simplified texts, large print to support visual impairment, one-on-one test administration, and more time for both instructional activities and testing. If Lin is offered the full range of supports for both his developing English proficiency and his disability, he can show what he knows on an assessment, often in ways that exceed teachers' expectations.

Importance of High-Quality State and Local Assessment Data on English Learners With Disabilities

As tempting as it may be to downplay the need for student assessment during uncertain educational times, schools rely on assessment data as the basis for multiple types of educational decisions. It is in the best interest of educators and their students to ensure that those data represent all students, particularly English learners with disabilities who are dually identified with perhaps the greatest need for high-quality education. The following types of educational decisions should reflect the needs of English learners with disabilities:

- Identification of students who need special education services. In what languages are special education assessments conducted? How are those test scores interpreted?
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of curricula, particularly for their linguistic and cultural appropriateness and their accessibility for students with dual diagnoses. For example, are current math curricula helping all students achieve the grade-level algebra standards, or do they require a significant amount of supplementation and adaptation to be appropriate for some students with disabilities or English learners who do not know the vocabulary?
- Pacing and sequencing instruction, including determining the need to reteach some content if students struggle with it.
- Determinations of how best to support students in making progress in the grade-level, standards-based curriculum. There may be district-wide, school-wide, classroom-level, and individual student supports offered based on student needs. Those needs may be determined, in part, by assessment scores. For example, based on aggregated science assessment scores for English learners and English learners with disabilities, a junior high school may decide to embed English language development instructional strategies and reading strategy instruction into every science course.
- Student grouping for instruction. Are decisions about who receives English language arts instruction from Mrs. Johnson, who tends to teach the more advanced students, based on test scores? Did linguistically and culturally diverse students have an equal chance to be placed in Mrs. Johnson's classroom? If they are placed there, has Mrs. Johnson had the appropriate training to know how to adapt instruction to meet their needs?
- Class scheduling, particularly for students who require specialized services or interventions, so that students do not miss critical content instruction (e.g., math interventions are scheduled during English language arts instruction, and students who are identified for math intervention based on test scores miss studying *Romeo and Juliet*).
- Examination of the effectiveness of interventions for linguistically and culturally diverse students with disabilities in a tiered system of supports. Is the vocabulary of math interventions in the Tier 1 general education classroom too difficult for a group of newly arrived Arabic-speaking students? Is the English reading level too difficult?
- Grading, based on the results of classroom assessments. Were those assessments developed for English learners with disabilities so students can show what they know? Did they have the necessary supports on the social studies chapter test to demonstrate what they understand?
- Graduation and diploma options.
- Postsecondary enrollment or career options, particularly those that require a test score.
- Determination of which state assessment a student should take (e.g., regular vs. alternate ELP assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities) using, in part, prior test scores.
- Resource allocations at the school or district level, particularly for Title III, special education, and programs like Title I that support students with learning challenges. Are data from English learners with disabilities used as part of the data used to make decisions about programs in need of more funding?
- State determinations about schools that need extra support to ensure all student subgroups are making sufficient academic progress and, for English learners, progress in English proficiency. Did the state assessment data used to make this decision include dually diagnosed students?

The list is long and represents perhaps just a fraction of the types of decisions made with assessment data. Some of them relate more to the use of school-level and classroom-level data for instructional decisions than to the use of state assessment data for accountability. But regardless of the type of assessment data used to support decisions, the overriding concern is whether all students, including English learners with disabilities, have equitable opportunities to learn and show what they know.

Consider the following example of an English learner with a disability. Jorge is a second-grade student from a Spanish-speaking home who has an intellectual disability. He produces one- to two-word sentences in a mixture of English and Spanish. Numerous decisions that affect Jorge's second-grade education and his long-term outcomes will be made with assessment data this year. His team needs to ensure that decisions made with those data are in his best interests. First, when he enters school as a new student, he will take an ELP screening test to

determine whether he would benefit from English language development services. If the screening test is not designed for students with intellectual disabilities, is offered on a computer he does not know how to use, or Jorge has not received well-designed English reading instruction, it may be difficult for teachers to make good decisions with his test scores. Do his scores truly represent a need for English instruction, or do they show the impact of his disability on his patterns of language use? Both things might be true. Has he had reading instruction before or do educators usually read things aloud to him? Further, do his scores show what he knows about using a computer or what he really knows and can do with English? If Jorge does not take the ELP screener, out of concern that the test may not be appropriate for him, his team will never know more than they do now. And Jorge will not receive the instruction to which he is entitled. The same decision might be made for other linguistically diverse students with intellectual disabilities in Jorge's school. If low assessment scores are used to excuse them from English language development instruction, the education system has denied them the opportunity to increase their English skills. In essence, the system has said, "We do not think you can learn more English than you already know."

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If Jorge's team decides, based on the results of his screening test scores, that he does need English language development instruction, he will be required to take an annual ELP assessment. Should he take the general assessment or the alternate ELP assessment for English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities? His team is unsure. The decision they make now, based in part on a collection of classroom-, district-, and state-level test scores, could influence Jorge's entire educational path. When he gets to third grade, should he take the general reading/language arts and math state assessments or the alternate assessments if he has already taken the alternate ELP assessment? A

decision to place him in the alternate assessments for reading/language arts and math could mean that until grade 12, he receives instruction of less depth, breadth, or complexity than his peers who do not take alternate assessments. Further, when he takes those assessments, will he have a chance to use the screen reader he uses in class to support his limited eyesight? Can he use the augmentative and assistive communication device he is just learning to use to support his communication? If not, he is being asked to perform on an assessment under very different conditions than those under which he learns in instruction. Do his test scores show that he cannot perform well if he cannot see the text in the assessment items? Or do his scores show that he did not learn the test content because the instruction did not meet his needs? There are consequences to Jorge regardless of the interpretation of those scores.

If every linguistically diverse student with an intellectual disability in Jorge's school takes the ELP assessment without accessibility features and accommodations they need for their disabilities, will the school look at their resulting assessment scores and determine that the English language development instruction they receive is ineffective? Will the school determine that the students are less capable of learning English and should be excused from the test? Or will educators and administrators understand that the test was not given under the conditions that would allow these students to show what they really can do? District and state assessments focus on aggregated student data and are used to make systems-level decisions, but the need to ensure that the test accurately represents what students know and can do is still critical.

Ensuring the Collection of the Appropriate Assessment Data for Making Decisions About English Learners With Disabilities

Educators want all of their students to be successful academically. To be successful, some students need adaptations or supports that make classwork and tests more accessible. Students who are English learners with disabilities will need adaptations and supports that specifically address their developing English skills as well as their specific disabilities. These adaptations and supports, called "accessibility

may decrease the effectiveness of the hearing aids somewhat, so an educator will want to look for ways to build in additional accessibility features and accommodations to further support Sara (e.g., seat her in a quieter spot in the classroom or testing room, use noise-canceling headphones on listening tasks including the computerized state assessment, etc.). Similarly, information about the student's migration status and mobility can be helpful in making instructional and assessment decisions. A student who has moved frequently may have missing or incomplete school records that teachers can use to help plan instruction and assessment supports. If that is the case, a teacher might want to explore other avenues to collect information about how the student learns best and demonstrates learning, such as talking with the family.

Some of these additional types of data can be obtained by consulting with the student's family and other teachers. English language development teachers, in particular, as well as special education teachers or paraprofessionals, may have insights not evident in cumulative records or by observing classroom behavior and performance alone.

IEP Team as the Hub for Assessment Decision Making for English Learners With Disabilities

When a student has an identified disability and is determined to need individualized instruction from a special educator, the student's IEP team identifies needed services and supports to meet that student's unique needs. Each year, the student's IEP is reviewed and updated at an IEP meeting. The IEP is a legally binding document that not only specifies the services the district will provide to the student but also details the supports the student should have in the classroom and during any testing situation.

The IEP team must include the student's parents or guardians, a general education teacher, a special educator, a school or district administrator, and, when appropriate, the student. When the student with a disability is also an English learner, it is critical that an English language development teacher or specialist be a part of the IEP team. Parents of English learners will need support to understand and engage in the IEP development process and in annual IEP team meetings. All IEP team members will need to understand the grade-level standards, the

assessments the child is required to take, and the decision-making processes associated with those assessments.

To support English language development for an English learner with a disability, the IEP should also address the student's skills in English and the student's native language. For example, IEPs for English learners often include a description of the type of English language development services the student receives and how much time per week he or she receives them. Ideally, the IEP also should contain a description of the student's ELP levels in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In addition, there might also be a description of supports or services that will be offered in the child's native language, if needed.

All IEP team members will need to understand the grade-level standards, the assessments the child is required to take, and the decision-making processes associated with those assessments.

Some English learners with disabilities have a Section 504 plan. This is a written plan for how a school will provide support and access to instruction for a student with a disability who does not need special education services. For example, a student with attention difficulties might need a specific accessibility feature such as using color overlays over paper-based materials to be successful with classroom work. However, that student may not require special education services. This student may have accessibility features listed in a 504 plan. Similar to an IEP, school staff must periodically review a student's 504 plan to make sure it is still appropriate.

Regardless of whether the student has a 504 plan or an IEP, the respective team needs to have a sufficiently broad knowledge and experience base to meet the needs, both current and future, of the student. The team will be helping parents to understand the accommodations and accessibility features that will be used, as well as the assessment and any consequences of the assessment. The team will also need enough knowledge to be able to understand the interrelated role of language learning and disability. Teams lacking this broad knowledge should seek additional training so they will be ready to meet all the challenges that come with navigating

this complicated process. It is important to remember that the IEP contains accessibility features and accommodations for both the specific disability and language-learning component. This can often be difficult to differentiate but is vital to the student's academic success.

Role of Administrators in Ensuring Appropriate Inclusion of English Learners With Disabilities in Assessments and Interpretation of Assessment Data

Special education administrators, school principals, and other administrators have a special role to play in ensuring that English learners with disabilities are appropriately served by the educational system. To serve as leaders, administrators will need knowledge about both federal and state requirements for special education and English language development services as well as what evidence has shown about how to support educators and parents as they make decisions about instruction and assessments for English learners with disabilities.

A starting point for administrators, regardless of their position, is to know the population of their English learners (and potential English learners) with disabilities. Designing training opportunities and supports for the educators who work with these students likely will be different if the population is large, encompasses only a few languages, includes only refugees, or varies in other ways.

School leaders also should support communication to break down any silos that might exist within the school, particularly among special educators, English language development educators, general educators, and other support personnel, including paraprofessionals, speech-language pathologists, and school psychologists. All of these professionals likely will need to be involved in decisions for English learners with disabilities. Of course, ensuring that the necessary representatives are able to participate in the IEP team decision-making process is essential; making sure that they have coverage so that they are able to participate is critical.

Providing relevant training, or supporting opportunities to participate in training, is an important role of administrators. Training should

cover not only the instructional and assessment decisions but also available accessibility and accommodations supports (those intended for students who both have disabilities and are English learners). Knowing what training resources on English learners with disabilities are available from the state or from other organizations (e.g., Liu et al., 2021) is the responsibility of administrators, as is adapting these or developing new training materials to ensure that the training is directly relevant to the English learners with disabilities population in the district or school.

Rarely discussed is the role of the administrator in ensuring that student assessment data, particularly those data from English learners with disabilities, are examined and interpreted accurately. School leaders can look at data by classroom but also should make an effort to examine data by student group, including not only students with disabilities and English learners as separate groups but also English learners with disabilities as a group, particularly if there are sufficient numbers of students. If sufficient numbers do not exist within a school, district leaders should be examining data for the district. Helping professionals within the district and within schools to make appropriate interpretations based on the data and on additional input from educators and other school professionals is a critical role for administrators to play to ensure that English learners with disabilities are appropriately included in assessments.

It is especially important that administrators understand the potential unintended consequences of both the assessment participation decision (i.e., whether the student participates in the general assessment or an alternate assessment) and decisions about needed accessibility supports and accommodations the student will receive during instruction and during assessments. For example, a decision that an English learner with disabilities will participate in the alternate assessment of reading/language arts, math, science, or other content may have implications for the depth, breadth, and complexity of instruction provided. A decision that an English learner with disabilities will participate in the alternate ELP assessment will have similar implications and may result in a student no longer receiving English language development services because the performance requirements for exit from services are different from those for English learners with disabilities who participate in the general ELP assessment. Ensuring that all IEP

Table 2: Resources to support assessment decisions for English learners with disabilities

Topic	Resource
Assessment participation decisions for English learners with significant cognitive disabilities	<i>A framework for making decisions about participation in a state's alternate ELP assessment</i> (NCEO Report 426), https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOReport426.pdf
Assessment accessibility and accommodations decisions	<i>Improving Instruction for English Learners Through Improved Accessibility Decisions</i> , training modules on English learners and English learners with disabilities, free with registration, https://nceo.info/About/projects/improving-instruction/home <i>Improving the Validity of Assessment Results for English Language Learners With Disabilities</i> , training modules free with registration, http://www.ivared.info/training.html <i>Making Accessibility Decisions for Everyone</i> , training modules free with registration, https://nceo.info/About/projects/diamond/training-modules <i>CCSSO Accessibility and Accommodations Decisions Manual: How to Select, Administer, and Evaluate the Use of Accessibility Supports for Instruction and Assessment of All Students</i> , https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/CCSSOAccessibilityManual_2021.docx
Family-educator communication about accessibility and accommodations	<i>Parent Educator Toolkit</i> , https://nceo.info/About/projects/improving-instruction/parent-educator-toolkit
Population descriptions	<i>Understanding the Characteristics of English Learners With Disabilities to Meet Their Needs During State and Districtwide Assessments</i> (NCEO Brief 24), https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/NCEOBrief24.pdf

participants, including the parents or guardians and potentially the student, have appropriate interpreter and translation services is important.

Helping professionals within the district and within schools to make appropriate interpretations based on the data and on additional input from educators and other school professionals is a critical role for administrators to play to ensure that English learners with disabilities are appropriately included in assessments.

Although English learners with disabilities are gaining attention from policy makers and administrators, resources available for making instructional and assessment decisions for these students (other than those provided by the states) remain relatively sparse. Still, there are resources that can be used or adapted by administrators for use in districts or schools. Some of these are listed in *Table 2*.

Concluding Thoughts

Special education directors have an important role to play in ensuring assessment data for English learners with disabilities are useful for making a wide variety

of educational decisions. To have meaningful and accurate assessment data that lead to sound decisions, students need access to consistent accessibility features and accommodations for both assessment and instruction. These supports must be individualized to meet the disability-related and language learning needs of each student. Making these types of determinations requires an established process for well-trained IEP teams to follow. Some of the most important contributions a special education director can make to achieving high-quality assessment data and sound decisions are to ensure IEP team members have an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of students and sufficient training. Training can address topics such as grade-level content and English proficiency standards, the nature of academic English and its relationship to learning academic subjects, foundational assessment concepts and accessibility features and accommodations to help students demonstrate their knowledge and skills with as few barriers as possible, and specific types of accessibility features and accommodations to support a variety of student needs.

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