Session B-2: Alternate ELP Achievement Standards
Panelists: *Audra Ahumada, Edynn Sato, Eric Zilbert, Melissa Gholson*
Moderator: *Donald Peasley, U.S. Department of Education, Office of State Support*

Under the ESSA, states must provide an AELPA for ELs with significant cognitive disabilities. States may develop AELPAs that are at the same level of achievement as the general ELP, or may optionally develop alternate ELP achievement standards. Panelists focused the discussion on the types of evidence needed to support alternate ELP achievement standards. This session specifically addressed critical elements 2.1, 2.2, section 3, and section 6 in the context of AELPA peer review.

Mr. Eric Zilbert provided information on what is known about ELs with significant cognitive disabilities. He displayed 2017 demographic data from the California Department of Education on alternate assessment ELs. Almost 40,000 students were eligible to be tested with the alternate assessments in grades 3-8 and 11 in both English Language Arts and mathematics. This was approximately 1.2 percent (39,885) of the total enrollment of 3,345,874 students in grades 3-8 and 11. Overall, 11.2 percent (409,271) of the total enrollment were students with disabilities and 9.7 percent of these students took the California Alternate Assessment (CAA). There were 10 percent special education students. The EL makeup of the population tested with the CAA was significantly different from that of the population tested with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) assessments.

Table 1. Number and Percentage of California Students by English Language Proficiency, 2017 English Language Arts Assessments

	CAA		SBAC	
Missing	42	0.1%	7,230	0.2%
EL	13,454	33.7%	597,612	18.1%
EO	23,674	59.4%	1,853,414	56.1%
IFEP	505	1.3%	150,920	4.6%
RFEP	2,183	5.5%	694,025	21.0%
TBD	27	0.1%	2,788	0.1%
Total	39,885	100%	3,305,989	100%

Note: EL = English learner; EO = English only; IFEP = initially fluent English proficient; RFEP = redesignated as fluent English proficient; TBD = to be determined.

In 2017, 13,454 of 39,885 students, or 33.7 percent, in the CAA-eligible population were classified as ELs. This is much higher than the 18.1 percent for the SBAC assessments. The proportion of students redesignated as fluent-English-proficient (RFEP) in the CAA-eligible population was 5.5 percent, much lower than the 21 percent redesignated for the SBAC assessments.

Gender and EL Status

The gender makeup of the CAA and SBAC students was quite different. The CAA population had a higher proportion of boys (66.9 percent) than the Smarter Balanced Population (51.1 percent). However, for the EL population, the gender difference was smaller. EL students in the CAA population consisted of 64.9 percent boys versus 55.2 percent for SBAC. In the previous year, for the California English Language

Development Test (CELDT) students' performance, none of the 1,000 students completed the entire test; each had an area they did not complete.

Economically Disadvantaged Status

In California, economically disadvantaged students make up 60 percent of the enrollment in grades 3-8 and 11. For the EL population, the percentage is 87 percent. Overall, the CAA population is 63.3 percent economically disadvantaged, and the EL population is 80.1 percent.

Table 2. Percentage of California English Learner (EL) Students by Disability Type and Assessment

Disability Type	CAA EL	CAA Not EL	SBAC EL	SBAC Not EL
Autism	26.6%	38.2%	5.8%	10.1%
Deaf-blindness	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Emotional disturbance	0.5%	0.9%	1.4%	4.6%
Hearing impairment	1.0%	1.0%	1.4%	1.6%
Intellectual disability	43.6%	32.8%	1.7%	1.1%
Multiple disabilities	4.7%	6.2%	0.1%	0.1%
Orthopedic impairment	4.5%	5.6%	8.9%	16.6%
Other health impairment	5.5%	5.2%	0.6%	0.7%
Specific learning disability	9.5%	6.4%	64.8%	47.1%
Speech or language impairment	2.8%	2.4%	14.9%	17.5%
Traumatic brain injury	0.5%	0.5%	0.1%	0.2%
Visual Impairment	0.6%	0.6%	0.3%	0.4%

Likelihood of Being Tested and Receiving a Valid Score

There was little difference in the likelihood of an EL student receiving a valid score on the CAA compared to the SBAC. For CAA students, 93.6 percent received a valid score, as compared to 95.2 percent of SBAC students. For the CAA assessment, students not classified as EL were more likely to have an incomplete test score in English language arts (25 percent) than EL students (21.1 percent). Students who were not ELs were more likely to be excluded from testing due to a medical condition or parent exemption (9.7 percent versus 5.7 percent).

Disability Types for EL Students on the CAA

Overall, CAA students show a different distribution of disabilities than for the SBAC assessments. Generally, the CAA population has more students with autism and intellectual disabilities than do the SBAC students with disabilities (SWD) population. The CAA also has fewer students identified with a specific learning disability or speech impairment than the SBAC. CAA EL students are more likely to be classified as having an intellectual disability than CAA students that are not ELs, and fewer students are classified as autistic in the EL group than in the non-EL group.

Score Differences

A major difference between the CAA and the SBAC assessments was the comparative performance of EL and non-EL students. For the SBAC, the difference in performance was generally on the order of a half of

a standard deviation or more in favor of the non-EL population. For the CAA, there was very little difference in the performance of EL versus non-EL students. In some grades and subjects, the EL students had a higher average scale score than the non-EL students. This difference raises important issues about the relationship between English language development and success in learning the academic curriculum for these students.

**Table 3. 2017 CAA Average English Language Arts Scale Scores
for EL and Non-EL Students, by Grade Level**

Grade	EL	Not EL
3	341.9	341.5
4	439.8	437.8
5	538.5	537.8
6	638.1	637.9
7	735.7	736.6
8	839.4	840.0
11	940.2	941.4

Home Language of ELs

- Spanish: 82.0 percent;
- Vietnamese: 3.5 percent;
- Chinese: 2.5 percent;
- Philipino: 1.8 percent;
- Arabic: 1.3 percent;
- Miscellaneous: 1.2 percent; and
- Korean: 0.7 percent.

Mr. Zilbert said language is more difficult to assess than math, and attention should be given to determining the best way to measure language.

Descriptive Statistics from the WIDA Alternate ELP Assessment (Alt ACCESS) for the Administration Years of 2015-2016 (2016) and 2016-2017 (2017)

Ms. Gholson presented data that represented 38 WIDA states and/or territories. She said the data was not capturing students in K, 1, and 2. Also, some states had high missing numbers and were trying to determine why. All the states were grappling with this issue. She noted that addressing disabilities and language development is the highest priority work they need to do. There is a vast range of complexity with various disability and EL levels, including high and low disabilities with high and low EL capabilities. They need to tease out the next steps.

She stated that in 2016, 20,480 EL students participated in Alt ACCESS in grades 1-12. In 2017, that number was 21,807. Across the 2016-2017 Alt ACCESS administrations, 12,124 matched records were identified, suggesting substantial movement into or out of Alt ACCESS administrations.

Table 4 shows the total count of students (ACCESS + Alt ACCESS) and the proportion of students by grade participating in Alt ACCESS by year. It also displays the reported average time students had been in EL programs by grade.

Table 4: Total WIDA Assessed Counts with Proportion Alt ACCESS Percentage and Average Time in Program for Alt ACCESS, by Grade

Grade	Total Count 2016	Total Count 2017	2016 Alt ACCESS%	2017 Alt ACCESS%	Average Time in Program 2016	Average Time in Program 2017
1	259,870	252,022	0.75%	0.84%	1.90	2.14
2	261,418	257,077	0.79%	0.82%	2.64	1.42
3	235,595	252,254	0.90%	0.90%	3.39	2.19
4	159,690	163,084	1.32%	1.33%	4.11	2.82
5	122,811	128,125	1.66%	1.63%	4.68	3.54
6	102,738	107,379	1.75%	1.91%	5.13	4.07
7	99,871	106,371	1.70%	1.64%	5.85	4.47
8	100,729	104,995	1.52%	1.60%	6.27	4.90
9	121,046	131,695	1.18%	1.12%	6.34	5.60
10	81,535	92,633	1.47%	1.45%	6.49	5.86
11	59,607	68,203	1.68%	1.70%	7.04	5.68
12	44,821	48,229	3.39%	3.27%	8.05	6.40
Total	1,649,731	1,712,067	1.24%	1.27%	--	--

Table 5 shows that, in the 38 states and territories in the sample, an average of 1 percent of students participated in Alt ACCESS. The state with the lowest percentage of students participating in Alt ACCESS across years was 0.15 percent in 2016 and 0.17 percent in 2017. The state with the maximum percent participating was 2.3 percent across both years.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of the Percent of EL Students in 38 States and Territories Taking Alt ACCESS

Statistic	2016	2017
Mean	1.04%	1.08%
STD	0.50%	0.51%
Min	0.15%	0.17%
Max	2.29%	2.27%
N States	38	38

Table 6 indicates that slightly less than two-thirds of students taking Alt ACCESS were males.

Table 6: Percent of EL Students by Gender Participating in Alt ACCESS, by Year

Gender	2016	2017
Female	36.0%	35.3%
Male	64.0%	64.7%
Total	20,252	21,499

When looking at the number of students talking Alt ACCESS by state size (see Table 7), smaller states tended to have relatively fewer ELs taking Alt ACCESS.

Table 7: Average Percent Participating in Alt ACESS by State Size, by Year

Size	State/Territory Count	Average % Taking Alt ACCESS 2016	Average % Taking Alt ACCESS 2017
Small (<25,000)	17	0.95%	0.99%
Medium (<100,000)	15	1.12%	1.17%
Large (> 100,000)	6	1.10%	1.14%

Table 8 displays the proportion of students with matched records in 2016 and 2017 who changed levels. In general, the majority of students stayed at the same AELPA proficiency levels they received in 2016. As AELPA levels increased, the proportion of students going down a level also increased.

Table 8: Proportion of Students Changing Levels 2016-2017

Alt ACCESS Level	Down a Level	Staying at a Level	Moving Up 1 Level	Moving Up more than 1 Level
A1	--	41%	34%	25%
A2	8%	40%	42%	10%
A3	11%	54%	29%	7%
P1	16%	51%	33%	--
P2	25%	36%	--	--

Table 9 displays the distribution of disability types of students participating on the Alt-ACCESS in 2016-17.

Table 9: Distribution of Disability Type on Alt ACCESS, 2016-2017

Disability Type	Percent	Count
Autism spectrum disorder	26.0%	4343
Deaf-blindness	0.1%	14
Developmental delay	5.1%	855
Hearing impairment, including deafness	0.5%	90
Intellectual disability	50.7%	8470
Multiple disability	4.8%	808
Other health impairment	4.7%	789
Orthopedic impairment	0.8%	137
Serious emotional disability	0.6%	99
Specific learning disability	4.4%	737
Speech or language impairment	1.5%	248
Traumatic brain injury	0.5%	83
Visual impairment, including blindness	0.1%	24
Missing	--	2378

Data from NCSC Alternate Assessment Consortium States, 2014-15

Ms. Audra Ahumada presented data from the NCSC Consortium and a report on autism and multiple disabilities, and cautioned that it's not accurate to identify the number of ELs based on their alternate assessments. However, tools such as the LCI, ICQ, and those from ALTELLA are relevant as the field begins to understand these students' characteristics.

Ms. Gholson added that ALTELLA has a toolkit for states that can help them evaluate students when teasing out language capabilities and disabilities in young children. She said that, in addition to participation criteria, there is a need for people with language expertise. Children are being inappropriately identified in categories. She said, "When in doubt, leave them out," and said it applies to general assessments. It's better for children to have access to the general assessment; they can have a chance to prove themselves, and if necessary, shift to AELPA.

Ms. Ahumada said there is often confusion about terminology; she clarified by quoting the Guide, page 23: "Alternate academic achievement standards set expectations of performance that differ in scope and complexity from grade-level achievement standards. A state may adopt alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and administer an AA-AAAS aligned with those standards." She said that when providing evidence for peer review, be clear about which students you are setting these standards for and how they are relevant and appropriate for ELP. Ms. Gholson added that that if you establish clear targets across proficiency levels, you will know if you assessed correctly when you get into standard setting. She said the rationale must be explained well.

The group discussed what makes the alternate ELP assessment different than the general ELP assessment. It was noted that 19 states came together to discuss alternate ELP standards. The discussion centered on setting high standards for these students. Important decisions are made about them based on their EL assessment, not their content knowledge, and this can affect their access to services. She said they did not want to lower expectations for these students. They have had to convince people that these students can do more. At the multistate meeting, they talked about college and career readiness and what that would look like for different ELP standards.

Ms. Ahumada said the peer group they were comparing these students to is non-ELs with significant cognitive disabilities. It is important to establish a common understanding about issues such as "Who is the comparative group?" and to center the assessment on the kind of supports that will be provided to these students. They provide extensive visual support, models, and demonstrations. They try to determine what that should look like, while being careful not to overload with language. They will need to document why certain decisions were made.

Addressing blueprints and the structure, she said that when you think about development, you need to look at levels of linguistic complexity and establish a rationale for establishing levels in your blueprints. Learn from your own data, and examine your system to make sure it makes sense. Coherence is not just about your peer review submission, but how it makes sense for the state. How will you set a cut in a group when you don't know a lot about performance?

One participant said that for their AELPA students, across all grades, about 14 percent are not able to address the assessment; they don't know how to respond. It's important to talk about what you will do for them. Some students respond by gesturing, not by writing; how do you equate speaking with gesturing so you can assess these students?

Ms. Ahumada responded by discussing progression toward ELP. A theory of language development underlies the current ELP standards. It's important as one moves toward AELPA standards and assessments to think about knowledge and skills. How do we expect this population to progress toward ELP? This can be addressed in the research, which can be used as evidence for some decisions.

Mr. Peasley asked the peer reviewers and reviewees about their challenges with this type of assessment. One reviewee said it's hard to have peer reviewers understand the complexity of the population. They need to be able to understand the state's evidence. There should be an ongoing conversation during which the state can call and say: "This is what we meant; how do we document it?"

A peer reviewer said one challenge is determining what constitutes a reasonable set of evidence for the critical elements. The Guide has very good examples. There is a range of quality of evidence and a degree of robustness that can help states present a sound argument. He said to think about the pieces of evidence that support different elements. Some evidence can support more than one element. It could be presented in a matrix or a strategic plan.

A Texas peer reviewee raised the issue of consistency of scoring. It would be interesting to look at four or five children that can communicate in Spanish, but not English, to determine how well they can produce in Spanish. It might help the measurement model.

A peer reviewer said an issue she has seen with the alternate assessments is in standardization of test administration and being able to document it. Inter-rater reliability studies were sometimes not

provided. She said they are starting with a new assessment development and design, and noted that the first round won't be perfect. Continual improvement and evaluation is necessary and should be in the theory of action. How can you plan a cognitive lab that is not overly burdensome? They don't know how students will react or what their experiences will be. The state's approach could be included in the rationale. There has been a lack of attention to improvement in a system once it's been developed.

Questions and Comments

- A participant asked, "Can we make progress before learning how to teach students English?" Ms. Gholson was optimistic and said to think about where the field was 15 years ago with alternate assessments. These students are now "rocking the technology." She said there's a lack of professional development for teachers in the area of EL development. Most teachers would welcome professional development, but states don't have sufficient capacity. She asked, "What are the program development areas? How do we get rid of the silos for ELs and students with disabilities?" She noted that even at the federal level, these two areas are in different silos. It's a very underserved population. She challenged participants to get out of the classrooms and observe.
- There are students who are getting EL instruction. Historically, assessments have been levers for change. The clearer we are about ELP standards and learning targets, the more we will have accountability for the change that's needed. We need positive models, and we need to focus on where things are working.
- A participant asked if there was a risk for false positives in assessments of this kind. The answer is yes, but we need to keep up with the data and not ignore it. Observe the students and talk to the teachers; don't make assumptions based on data alone. You need to get out and see the students. We are also underutilizing parents who know how proficient their children are in their native language. The screeners don't go down far enough. We need to be able to tease out language and disability and have IEPs. An evaluation team should pay a great deal of attention to language. We must get clarity about language and communication. Otherwise, people won't know what we mean by these terms.
- The point was made that the least restrictive environment and access to general content are important. If you're in a self-contained environment, you're not around others who are at a proficient level. These students need the opportunity to hear English being spoken.
- One solution could be to look more closely at communication devices. We need to think differently about how to identify progress. If a device is only in English, how helpful is it? The field needs to have these conversations. Devices could be adapted for home use with the native language or the use of symbols or images.
- A participant asked the panel if there was any research on reclassification. The response was that if we develop the right assessment design, we should see the same kind of progress as for the general population. Alternate and general assessments have come more in line. It was noted that Mr. Cook did an analysis of possible exit criteria. Mr. Cook said they've had data in Texas since 2010. The concern with his data set was that not all states have chosen to reclassify students, so he doesn't trust his data on how long it takes to exit. A panelist added that this also goes back to whether these students are receiving services.
- The point was made that we have the ability to operationalize what the construct is. ALTELLA is helping in this area. We often see students on one end or the other. Why is that? Can we not measure it, or are the students not getting support?

- A participant said they are not going to see new resources coming out for students in the states, so they need to get current educators to understand the work that needs to be done. The educators will have to engage as the field moves forward.
- It was noted that they were asking the right questions and will move toward being able to address them, resulting in standards and evidence. They need to attend to the critical aspects of student support, so that as they get more in line, they will be able to answer these questions.
- There was a meeting in May 2018 on what it means to be a proficient speaker of English in this population. The meeting participants looked at comparative groups and comparing ELs to ELs with cognitive disabilities. The same kinds of students (true peers) need to be compared to each other. This is a policy issue.