

### **Session D-3: Alternate ELP Achievement Standards**

**Panelists: Audra Ahumada, Gary Cook, Kim Brannan, Tracey Hembry**

**Moderator: Amy Bae, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services**

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

Ms. Amy Bae moderated a follow-up discussion based on the previous panels held on this topic. She turned the conversation over to Mr. Cook, Senior Director of Assessment for the WIDA Consortium. WIDA has had an alternate ELP assessment since 2013, known as Alternate ACCESS for English Language Learners (Alt ACCESS). It is a secure, large-scale English language proficiency assessment administered to students in grades 1-12 identified as ELs with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to meaningfully participate in ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. This paper-based assessment is given annually in WIDA consortium member states to monitor students' progress in acquiring academic English. Alternate ACCESS for ELLs assesses each of the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Mr. Cook presented charts and graphs on student demographics. Of the 250,000 students identified as ELs in the data set, about .75 percent of those students took Alt ACCESS in 2016-17 and .84 percent took the test in 2017-18. The average time of the program is about 2 years for grades K-1. As the grade increases, in general, the percent of English learners identified as students participating in Alt ACCESS also increases. There is a high of about 3 percent of students who took the Alt ACCESS in grade 12. As grade levels increased, fewer students participated. That is typical, said Mr. Cook, who noted that two-thirds of the EL students in most states are in grades K-5. Students in Alt ACCESS tend to stay in Alt ACCESS.

As grade levels go up, the length of time in the program goes up as well. In high school, on average, students are in the program for 6 to 8 years. WIDA has discovered that students often are not being reclassified in Alt ACCESS. Once students participate, they don't get out. Recent conversations have addressed students being reclassified using alternate ELP assessments, and the fact that there are methods for doing that. Some WIDA states have expressed confusion about whether that can happen.

This population of students tends to be heterogeneous. That raises questions about different disability types having different trajectories. In general, the proportion of students seen across WIDA states is about 1 percent of the ELs across the grades participating in Alt ACCESS. Slightly less than two-thirds of the students identified as taking Alt ACCESS in 2016-17 were male. One-third were female. That number remains similar in California and very likely in other places. Mr. Cook noted few differences in the proportion of students identified in Alt ACCESS by state size. Smaller states have fewer incidences of students taking Alt ACCESS than larger or moderate-sized states, but the difference is relatively small.

Alt ACCESS has five operational levels. Generally, 40 to 50 percent of students do not move levels on Alt ACCESS across years. This information remains consistent. About 40 to 50 percent of students stay at the level they were assigned during the previous year. About one-third, depending the level, move up one level. Slightly less than that move up two levels. Other analyses have shown that movement on Alt

ACCESS is very dissimilar from the movement seen on ACCESS.

Reviewing disability types, Mr. Cook said that slightly more than half of the students have an intellectual disability that is considered a significant cognitive disability. About 26 percent have an autism disorder. The chart identified only primary disability.

Ms. Ahumada displayed 2015 data from NCSC. She said states face challenges with identifying these students. For the NCSC Multi-State Alternate Assessment of Arizona (MSAA,) the state used the LCI, which was developed in the state's platform for its assessment. The state obtains data on all students that participate in the alternate assessment. Ms. Ahumada noted that the data in NCSC-MSAA is only for grades 3-11. The state does not have data on K-2 students because they are not in the alternate assessment. States must remain aware of that other group of students. Tracking of these students could start with a definition. Ms. Ahumada shared the definition of EL students with significant cognitive disabilities developed by ALTELLA: "English learners with significant cognitive disabilities are individuals with difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language as they are progressing toward English language proficiency, and who have one or more disabilities that significantly impact their intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior."

Ms. Kim Brannan shared information on findings in Texas. The state started developing an alternate assessment and looking at the data about a year ago. Texas had about a million students identified as LEP, and 45,000 taking the alternate assessment. Of that, about 4,500 students are identified in grades 3 through high school taking the alternate and identified as LEP. Students in grades K-2 are not in the assessment system.

Texas also looked at students who took the alternate assessment and were LEP, assessing participation during previous years with the general English language proficiency assessment (ELPA). Ms. Brennan said about half were exempt from all domains. About half were tested in at least one domain. Of the students tested in at least one domain, about 85 percent were beginners. The other 15 percent were intermediate.

The state collected other interesting data. About 1,000 children who were taking the alternate assessment and who were LEP did not sign up for or take the general ELPA. Texas continues to investigate why those students were missing and how to get them back into the system, in accordance with participation requirements. Students in grades 3-12 that are eligible for an alternate assessment and identified as LEP must take the alternate *Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System* (TELPAS Alt). For students in grade 2, participation requires identification as LEP. Students in K-1 take the general ELPA.

Ms. Tracey Hembry offered some takeaways from the discussion:

- States need thoughtful conversations about defining this population when starting down this path. Existing data can be examined to get an idea of the population served once the state develops those definitions.
- States also should conduct reasonableness checks when the data come back. Is the testing population for this group far greater than expected? That information will provide feedback about training needs, moving forward.

Mr. Cook noted the challenges of consortia-based assessments in looking across states for trends. One state might have 50 EL students, while another has 300. One state's alternate assessments might elicit

different exit criteria than another state's. Each state identifies its students differently, so aggregation or comparison across states is a challenge.

Ms. Ahumada said ALTELLA has not developed an assessment, but through a grant, the organization has been gathering information about the characteristics of these students. ALTELLA also has done some work on item template designs after identifying the students. This research and data will soon be available.

Ms. Ahumada highlighted documents on the ALTELLA website that can help states identify these students and use state data to dig deeper, run analyses, and gain more information. States can use this information to address myths about which students are ELs with significant cognitive disabilities. The material encourages states to use a team approach in identifying and serving these students. She said NCSC has defined reading and writing for students with significant cognitive disabilities. With help from these resources, Arizona will next develop participation criteria as part of an effort to develop an alternate ELP.

Mr. Cook briefly addressed how WIDA identified performance-level definitions for Alt ACCESS. Alt ACCESS was an enhanced assessment grant awarded in 2010 to develop an alternate ELP assessment. Unlike ALTELLA, however, Alt ACCESS has not gone into the classrooms to see what these students can do. WIDA will incorporate ALTELLA's research findings when the data become available.

Ms. Brannan said Texas extended its general alternate assessment to include pre-beginner to approximately intermediate levels. The strategy provides both teacher and student perspectives. The state uses levels 1-5 for its proficiency-level descriptors. In the next year or two, Texas will make its standards more grade-level specific, and assessments will evolve in that direction as well.

### **Questions and Comments**

Questions from the audience addressed grade-level assumptions, exit criteria, and how to justify a certain number of assessments. Ms. Kinge Mbella asked if the peer reviewers saw real benefit in giving students an alternate ELP assessment versus the alternate assessment only. Ms. Ahumada responded that the alternate ELP assessment is a legal requirement. Further, these students deserve an assessment that gives teachers good information. The assessment will help teachers better serve the students. MSAA has found a way to develop meaningful assessments for students who have significant cognitive disabilities and possibly medical concerns.

Mr. Cook noted that there are problems with multiple assessments. However, assessments give students additional resources to learn content while learning the language. Texas has seen greater success by involving teachers in every stage of the process, said Ms. Brannan. Special education teachers especially appreciate collaboration on methods for bringing more language instruction into the classroom.