



THE QUESTION

How can school systems use the results of state English Language Proficiency assessments along with progress monitoring tools in the classroom to determine instructional implications to supporting language development for English Learners?

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Appropriate Use of Standardized ELP Assessments to Inform Instruction

Annual summative English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessments are used for accountability to ensure students are learning and mastering the English language knowledge and skills they need to achieve in school and their careers. These high-stakes standards-based assessments inform classification of students as English learners (ELs) and the instructional programs and services students are assigned. These assessments also are used to monitor student progress toward English proficiency. While these summative assessments are not developed for the purpose of guiding day-to-day instructional practice, the assessment results can provide a starting point for engaging with additional assessment resources and tools to support ELs' progress toward proficiency (examples of resources and tools are described below).

When summative ELP assessments are developed using a principled approach to design, there is purposeful consideration of instruction and the learning targets associated with the ELP standards measured by the assessment. There is also a strong correspondence between the ELP standards measured and grade-level academic content standards. This approach ensures that the summative ELP assessment results provide educators with a high-level snapshot of the English language knowledge and skills on which students are making progress and ones which may require more instructional support and attention (See Addendum 1).

The ELPA21 summative is an example of an annual ELP assessment that yields proficiency scores for each of the four language domains (L-listening, S-speaking, R-reading, W-writing), and an overall proficiency level determination of emerging, progressing, or proficient. These scores can be used in conjunction with other assessment resources and tools to inform instruction by helping educators identify knowledge and skills that require additional attention and support as ELs progress toward proficiency.



THE EVIDENCE

Scaffolding Instruction and Progress Monitoring

While standardized assessments are not expressly developed for the purpose of guiding day-to-day instructional practice, the individual student data reported on standardized ELP assessments provides a starting point for engaging with additional assessment system resources and tools. As mentioned previously, information from the ELPA21 assessment provides educators and their supervisors a snapshot of a student's level of English language proficiency at the time of the assessment, and this information provides a point at which additional formative assessment and progress monitoring resources can be used to address students' needs. For example, a combination of the domain scores from the ELP assessment, in conjunction with ongoing progress monitoring and formative assessment practices, provides educators with the information they need to effectively group students for small group instruction and deliver appropriate interventions.

To illustrate; 6th grade ELs whose ELP writing domain scores (level 2) indicate a need for additional writing support can be provided small group instruction to deliver intensive writing interventions as indicated by the grade 6-8 Achievement Level Descriptor for writing (Addendum 2) which states: When writing, the student at level 2 is working on participating in short written exchanges; composing claims, narratives, or informational texts about familiar topics; providing a reason or fact to support the claim; responding to simple and wh- questions; recounting a brief sequence of events in order; using frequently occurring general academic and content-specific words and phrases. The teacher can use this information to build sentence frames with wh- questions to assist the 6th grade EL to write answers to the questions that non-EL are responding to without the sentence frames (i.e., open-ended responses). The grade level content standard target remains the same, but the task is scaffolded to provide additional writing support for ELs based on the ALD for level 2 writing.

ELPA21 provides a variety of resources and tools to assist in the process of scaffolding and differentiating instruction as described below: English Language Proficiency Standards, Achievement Level Descriptors, and Proficiency Level Descriptors.

English Language Proficiency Standards

Anchoring multiple sources of information (e.g., obtained via quizzes, interim tests, assignments, other progress-monitoring tools) to a common set of standards ensures consistency between instruction and assessment; that is, consistency between the knowledge and skills the student has the opportunity to learn and master and the knowledge and skills for which the student is being held accountable for mastering.

The ELP standards provide educators with a roadmap for supporting students' development of English language proficiency in a manner that also can help ELs access core content instruction and achieve academically. More specifically, for each standard, there are descriptions of levels of proficiency (i.e., Levels 1-5) that reflect a trajectory of development toward mastery of a standard. Teachers can use the ELPA21 assessment results and these level descriptors to help define a student's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), determine the comprehensible inputs and outputs within the student's ZPD, and scaffold language within the context of content (academic language) to help ELs progress toward mastery of ELP and grade-level academic content.

Achievement Level Descriptors and Proficiency Level Descriptors

The Achievement Level Descriptors (ALDs) describe students' English language skills as measured by ELPA21 assessments; these descriptors can be used by educators to differentiate instruction for ELs based on their proficiency level (See Addendum 2).

For example, two 3rd grade students might be in the "Progressing" category with very different domain score profiles. Student 1 could be considered progressing with scores of L2, R4, W3, and S2, and would benefit from support around listening and speaking, but seems to be reading at grade level. Consider how the support offered would differ for a student who scored L4, R3, S4 and W3. This student needs support on writing and reading but is very close to performing at grade level across all 4 domains. So rather than forcing classroom educators to glean information from a single composite score that may or may not mask what students are struggling with, ELPA21's score detail helps educators pinpoint instruction based on the four domain level scores.

Proficiency Level Descriptors (PLDs) provide another tool to guide educators' instructional decision making. To support classroom instruction and school-based judgements about supports the student needs, each standard's range of performance is reflected across five levels, showing a

progression of how ELs demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities related to receptive, productive, and interactive communication as their ELP evolves. (See Addendum 3)

For example, when pinpointing and personalizing classroom instruction, ELPA21 educators refer to the ALDs and PLDs, which reflect how ELP knowledge, skills, and abilities present in classroom contexts. Educators will also refer to the corresponding content area practices embedded in each ELP standard. So, for example, to support a Grade 5 EL who is learning about “algebraic thinking” (CCSS Math 5.OA.A.1), an EL educator can refer to ELP standards 5.1 and 5.9, which support the skills needed to parse a word problem into a sequence of mathematical operations and utilize the ALDs to determine how to scaffold the math task based on the student’s proficiency level scores in each of the four language domains.



CONCLUSION

ELP assessment results play a critical role in the overall educational delivery system for ELs. The domain scores provide the springboard for the instructional decision making in the classroom where educators are working hard to ensure that ELs have equitable access to challenging grade level content standards-based instruction while progressing towards proficiency in English. These scores should be considered in conjunction with additional assessment data and used with the ELP standards, ALDs, PLDs, and other tools to scaffold instruction and classroom assessment practices.