



Quality of English Language Proficiency Assessments:

***Evaluation of State and Local Implementation of
Title III Assessment and Accountability Systems***

English Learners With Disabilities Meeting Summary

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Overview

The meeting on English learners (ELs) with disabilities was held at the U.S. Department of Education, LBJ Auditorium from 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. on March 16, 2015. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity for experts in the assessment and instruction of ELs with disabilities to present recent research and development efforts in this area, and to discuss key questions related to these topics and needed areas of research. Additionally, the meeting was intended to help inform the development of a Peer Review Guidance document that will be used to assist state education agencies (SEAs) in preparing materials for the peer reviewers who will review the implementation of state Title III assessment and accountability provisions. The meeting included three panel presentations and subsequent moderated discussions: (1) Differentiating Language and Literacy Acquisition From Disability; (2) Fostering Valid and Reliable English Language Proficiency (ELP) Assessments for ELs With Disabilities; and (3) Assessing ELs With Significant Cognitive Disabilities—ELP Standards and Assessments, and Growth and Attainment Criteria.

The meeting was attended by approximately 100 people. Additionally, a total of 334 unique IP addresses tuned in to the live broadcast of the event, with a maximum of 266 IP addresses at any one time. Many invitees informed AIR and ED staff that they were organizing teacher groups, faculty groups, and student groups to watch the event. The PowerPoint presentations will be posted and archived on the Office of English Language Acquisition website (see the “livestream” of the presentation at <http://edstream.ed.gov/webcast/Play/63d02888372148e68b1cb37f8da6e3511d?catalog=82d9933c-1256-4cb2-8783-89599eb97fd8>)

This report briefly provides background information related to the meeting, followed by a summary of the presentations and discussion for each panel. Appendix A includes a meeting agenda, Appendix B includes a list of project staff and panelists involved in this meeting, Appendix C includes cameos for the moderators and panelists, and Appendix D includes resources associated with the presentations.¹

Title III of ESEA

Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Educational Act (ESEA) was passed to provide federal funding to state and local education agencies to develop language instruction programs that assist ELs in acquiring English and meeting the same academic content standards as their English-proficient peers. It also inaugurated important changes in assessment and accountability for ELs; requiring states to establish state standards for English language proficiency (ELP) that correspond with state academic content standards required under Title I. ESEA requires an annually administered ELP assessment based on those standards and measuring the four domains of reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

¹ The resources in Appendix D differ from the references at the end of this document and in the accompanying PowerPoint because they report on the work presented.

The Annual Measureable Achievement Objectives

AMAO 1: Annual increases in the number or percentage of ELs making progress in learning English.

AMAO 2: Annual increases in the number or percentage of ELs attaining English language proficiency (ELP) by the end of each school year as determined by a valid and reliable assessment of ELP.

AMAO 3: Making adequate yearly progress (AYP) on content area assessments for EL children.

Title III also instituted new accountability requirements for districts and states. These EL accountability provisions, the Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives, require states to define criteria for progress in learning English, establish a performance standard for ELP and academic content knowledge, and set annually increasing performance targets for the number and percentage of ELs meeting these criteria.

As of 2012–13, there were 543,916 English learners with disabilities in U.S. public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2013); this represents 8.5 percent of ELs and 13 percent of all students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Common Core of Data, 2013). Students classified as ELs can fall under any one of the 13 IDEA 2004 disability categories, but are most frequently classified as having specific learning disabilities, speech/language impairments, intellectual disabilities, or emotional-behavioral disorders (Watkins & Liu, 2013; McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, & D’Emilio, 2005).

According to an exclusionary clause in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400, 1997 Amendments), students cannot be classified as having a disability if their learning difficulties are primarily a result of “environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.” Language in the regulations states that a child must not be identified as having a disability “if the determinant factor for that determination is...Limited English proficiency; and...if the child does not otherwise meet the eligibility criteria” (CFR 300.306(b)(1)(iii)-(b)(2)). This has been interpreted to mean that ELs can only be determined eligible for special education services if their limited competence in comprehension, speaking, reading, and composition is not related to a lack of appropriate instruction or limited English proficiency (Park, 2014). As a result of the exclusionary clause, Response to Intervention has been the most commonly recommended method for assessing ELs to determine whether they have disabilities (Chu & Flores, 2011; Klingner, Artiles, & Barletta, 2006). For a review of the literature on ELs with disabilities, we refer you to a recent paper prepared by Soyoung Park (2014), Stanford Graduate School of Education. For recent information related to evaluating ELs for special education services and serving ELs that are dual-identified, we refer you to the recently released OCR/DOJ *Dear Colleague Letter on English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents*: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>.

Panel 1: Differentiating Language and Literacy Acquisition From Disability

Panel Overview

The first panel focused on how to differentiate between English learners (ELs) who have specific learning disabilities or speech/language impairments and those who may appear to have disabilities or impairments only because they are in the process of acquiring English. More specifically, Panel 1 focused on methods and measures to determine whether ELs have specific learning disabilities or speech/language impairments, differences in methods/measures based on level of language proficiency and age, and benchmarks/comparison groups used to determine adequate progress.

Panel Presentations

Dr. Aquiles Iglesias, Professor at the University of Delaware, presented on the identification of speech/language impairment in ELs. For children acquiring two languages, knowledge acquired is distributed across two languages, and therefore the total score in one language only provides partial information. He maintained that the best measure of language ability takes into consideration the nature of a child's distributed knowledge. The ideal assessments for the identification of children with language impairments, therefore, should occur early, assess process and product, account for distributed knowledge, and compare performance to similar students. Dr. Iglesias provided an overview of currently available assessments that consider the unequal distribution of language skills across a student's languages: the Preschool Computerized Language Assessment (PCLA), Bilingual English Spanish Assessment (BESA), and Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts (SALT). In addition, Dr. Iglesias noted that markers of language impairment vary across languages; he talked about the needs of students who do not qualify for speech and language services as well as those who at first seem to be developing typically, but then stop making adequate progress.

Dr. Esther Geva, Professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, presented on findings from assessments of disabilities in ELs struggling with phonological processing, word recognition, decoding, and spelling skills (Figure 1 presents the test battery administered in the longitudinal work described by Geva). While ELs have historically faced both over- and under-identification of learning disabilities (see Cummins, 1996, and Limbos & Geva, 2001), Dr. Geva's research has shown that we should expect the proportion of learning disabilities among both ELs and native English speakers to be equivalent. Our challenge, according to Dr. Geva, is how to separate second-language status from a possible learning disability.

Figure 1. Test Battery



Both ELs and monolingual students with learning disabilities show similar overall reading profiles, despite the differences in English language proficiency. However, we must consider transfer from the student’s first language and developmental trends by component. Dr. Geva noted that “negative” transfer effects disappear over time for typically developing students. Developmental trends are similar for ELs and native speakers for certain skills, such as rapid naming, phonemic awareness, and word reading. However, ELs show slower growth than their monolingual peers in vocabulary and reading comprehension. Dr. Geva emphasized the importance of being mindful of current norms, and of comparing ELs’ growth to a relevant reference group.

Dr. Sylvia Linan-Thompson, Associate Professor at the University of Texas at Austin, presented an exploratory study comparing global and discrete measures when assessing ELs’ writing. She noted that recently there has been increased interest in writing, and that 72 percent of fourth graders are “below proficient” in this domain as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress). There has been an increased interest in writing and monitoring progress in writing because ELs are generally not included in the research on such measures. The exploratory study reported by Dr. Linan-Thompson was conducted to better understand the writing development of ELs in English and Spanish. Students received reading instruction in Spanish; writing instruction was in both languages. Teachers used a writers’ workshop model for writing instruction. Data sources for this study consisted of journal samples and the Stanford English Language Proficiency and Stanford Spanish Language Proficiency measure. The study found that, generally, students with average levels of English proficiency wrote more words than students with low levels of English proficiency or dyslexia. Average-proficiency students were better spellers than students in the other two groups, as measured by both total words correct (TWC) and correct word sequences (CWS). Average-proficiency students had higher holistic scores than students in the other two groups. The research team intends to continue to code writing to determine whether there are differences between students with low levels of English proficiency and students with dyslexia in student growth on any measures.

Dr. Alba Ortiz, Professor Emeritus at the University of Texas at Austin, discussed multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). An essential component of MTSS is a multi-tier approach to

providing high-quality instruction and intervention, matched to student needs (Elliott, 2008). In this framework, progress is closely monitored, and changes in instruction are based on data collected from ongoing assessment. To help support ELs within MTSS, practitioners should assess students in their first or second language or both, depending on the model, and should ensure that measures are validated for ELs. They should also ensure that interventions are research based and linguistically and culturally appropriate.

For additional information on MTSS see:
National Center on Intensive Intervention
<http://www.intensiveintervention.org/>

For additional information on the IRIS Center
RTI Module, see:
<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/rti01-overview/>

Panel 1 Discussion

The moderated discussion took place after the first two presentations and again after the second two presentations. This second discussion was followed by an open forum where questions were taken from the audience and those streaming the event online.

During the first moderated discussion, Dr. Abedi asked how we can prevent misclassification based on low levels of English language proficiency. Dr. Geva responded that we now know that students with good phonological awareness in their first language are not at risk for a specific learning disability even if they demonstrate some difficulty with phonological awareness in their second language. Additionally, we must use an appropriate comparison group, rather than norms for monolingual students. Dr. Iglesias added that although the BESA allows for early identification of students coming from Spanish-speaking homes, we must also consider the needs of those students who are not language impaired but are at risk for reading problems. Dr. Geva expanded on this point by saying that while diagnosis often involves a cut point, students who do not qualify for special education may still have learning issues and might benefit from additional instructional support.

Dr. Thurlow asked how we assess students who do not have the oral communication skills required for many of these measures. Dr. Iglesias responded that we do not yet have good assessment methods for those students who are ELs and are deaf or have hearing impairments, and who might also be learning American Sign Language (ASL). Dr. Geva reported that in the case of selective mutism, the assessment procedures might be the same for ELs and monolinguals.

Dr. Cook asked how we can determine the difference between a learning disability and a language issue early on. Dr. Geva responded that phonemic awareness and rapid naming measures can be used with ELs with fairly limited English proficiency but not with newcomers. Her research group is starting to look at the M-Plus for specific subgroups and is finding that

phonological memory is predictive of vocabulary growth, and can be used with these ELs because it is based on nonsense words. Dr. Iglesias confirmed that nonsense word repetition seems to be functioning well in assessing ELs. Dr. August asked the panel what other measures are predictive. Dr. Geva mentioned rapid letter naming. Dr. Iglesias said that mapping, such as fast mapping of nouns, is predictive of vocabulary and comprehension. He reminded the audience, however, that these measures reflect both innate ability and the “product” of instruction. Dr. Gong asked if early screening would help address the issue of overidentification. Dr. Iglesias said it could, but only if we continue to monitor those students determined to be at risk by the screener. Dr. Geva said we must consider in which language the student knows more and compare the student to the appropriate reference group. Dr. Iglesias emphasized it is best to compare outcomes for bilingual students with those for students from similar backgrounds.

During the second moderated discussion, Robert Linquanti asked about the reclassification criteria for students who are ELs with disabilities. He asked that the panel reflect on reasonable criteria for exiting students who are dually identified as English learners and students with disabilities. Dr. Geva responded that it is important to keep the same reclassification criteria as the criteria used for those singly identified students because lowering the criteria could be a civil rights issue. Dr. Ortiz pointed out that by focusing on the instructional process and by monitoring progress, one can re-evaluate whether a student continues to benefit from the instructional support he or she is receiving in English language development classes or from special language support. Dr. Ortiz noted that it is important to continue monitoring students after exiting the intervention to ensure that they are meeting all the necessary learning targets. Additionally, according to the panel, it is important to look at the disability itself to understand how it might influence achievement on tests and performance.

Panelists noted that it is important to consider the teacher- and system-level factors when looking at data; if there are classrooms where a majority of students are below the expected level of achievement, teacher or system factors rather than disabilities might be at play. If the system and teachers are supportive and effective, then one should consider the student factors.

Panel 1 Key Takeaways

- Language assessments should account for children’s distributed knowledge across the all of languages they speak.
- Valid and reliable assessments to adequately identify language-impaired ELs are available in some partner languages.
- Low-performing ELs who do not qualify for special education services should be closely monitored and provided additional support.
- Writing samples can provide important insights into ELs’ language development.
- ELs fail for a variety of reasons, including deficiencies in the learning environment, individual attributes (e.g., the presence of learning disabilities), and the interplay of individual and environmental factors.

- Key elements of a multi-tier system of support (MTSS) are a positive school environment, curriculum and instruction that are differentiated to address learning needs, continuous progress monitoring, data-based decision-making, and collaboration across programs (e.g., English as a Second Language, bilingual education, general education, and special education programs).
- It is possible to diagnose dyslexia in ELs—there is no need to delay diagnosis and relevant remediation. The overall profiles of ELs and English monolinguals who have dyslexia are similar (except for aspects of English language proficiency).
- Like monolingual students, ELs with persistent difficulties in word-level skills have difficulties with processing factors (e.g., phonological awareness, RAN, memory, auditory discrimination), accurate and fluent word reading and spelling, reading comprehension, and writing text.
- We should expect the same percentage of English monolinguals and English learners to have a reading disability or language impairment.
- Approaches to remediation that work for monolinguals appear to work for ELs too.

Research and Data Needs

- Research to identify appropriate assessment practices for scoring ELs' writing is needed.

Panel 2: Fostering Valid and Reliable ELP Assessments for ELs With Disabilities

Panel 2 Overview

The second panel focused on valid and reliable methods to determine ELs' English language proficiency levels in the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; panelists focused on ELs who have specific learning disabilities or speech/language impairments and those with vision or hearing impairments. More specifically, the second panel focused on fostering valid and reliable methods for assessing the English language proficiency (ELP) of (1) ELs who have specific learning disabilities or speech/language impairments, and (2) ELs whose major mode of communication in one or more domains is not text- or speech-based (e.g., braille, American Sign Language). The second panel also discussed creating composite scores for ELs who do not take all components of an assessment and methods for assuring comparability of ELP test scores administered with different accommodations.

Panel 2 Presentations

Dr. Martha Thurlow, Director of the National Center for Educational Outcomes (NCEO), presented on the implications from research and practice for assessing the English language proficiency of ELs with disabilities. The work of NCEO has focused on technical assistance related to assessment, especially for students with disabilities, English learners, and English learners with disabilities. Dr. Thurlow described a continuum of EL needs and disability-related needs and how accommodations should be individualized based on where students' needs fall on these dimensions.

As of 2011, all but one state provided criteria for the participation of ELs with disabilities in their ELP assessments. States rarely address what happens to the students' scores when the students are not able to participate in all domains of the ELP assessment. When states do indicate what happens to scores, it is generally to indicate either that a student's non-participation in some domains did not count against school participation rates or that, if an alternative means of assessing the student was used, the score was considered invalid. In summarizing state policies, Dr. Thurlow reported that selective participation on the ELP assessment was allowed for students who are deaf/hard of hearing in 26 states. The least controversial accommodations included the use of sign interpretation of directions and amplification equipment. Selective participation on the ELP assessment is allowed for students who are blind/visually impaired in 24 states, with the least controversial accommodations being braille, large print, and magnification equipment. Few state policies addressed read-aloud directions; more states were likely to allow read-aloud directions for writing than for listening and speaking, and braille is prohibited for the writing domain in 25 states. Focus group research revealed that the IEP process was commonly used to guide decisions about accommodations on content assessments, but was less frequently used for ELP assessment accommodations. Focus group results also indicated there is a need for support and guidance specific to ELs with disabilities from school and state education leaders on assessment and accommodations. It also identified a need for additional qualified staff and

training, clear and consistent written assessment policies, and appropriate uses of state accountability test scores.

This work brings with it some important implications. First, better national and state data are needed on ELs with disabilities, including information on their disabilities, language background, assessment participation, and proficiency. Accessibility and accommodations policies should be based on determinations about the construct being tested. More research and discussion is needed to determine what listening and possibly speaking mean for a student who is deaf or hard of hearing, what reading and possibly writing mean for a student who is blind or visually impaired, and how to determine writing proficiency for a student who has a significant motor disability. Based on decisions about constructs, plans need to be made for obtaining a total score for all students. Dr. Thurlow noted that no student should be denied a language proficiency score because of his or her disability. More training is needed on appropriate decision making for participation and accommodations for ELs with disabilities. The IEP team must include professionals who know English language development (ELD), and the IEP team should make decisions about both language development and content development.

Dr. Jamal Abedi, Professor of Educational Measurement at the University of California, Davis, presented on considerations for test accommodations. According to Dr. Abedi, dually identified students (ELs with disabilities) are most at risk, face the greatest academic challenges, and are often at the lowest level of ELP; in fact, they often score 1–1.5 standard deviations below mainstream students on content-based assessments. There is a high rate of misclassification of EL students at the lowest level of English proficiency, since it is difficult to distinguish between limited English proficiency in reading and reading disabilities. EL students who also have a disability may receive accommodations due to their EL status or due to disabilities (IEP or 504 plans). If accommodations are used for EL students with disabilities, states should provide evidence on effectiveness of accommodations and validity of accommodated assessment outcomes. The most effective accommodations for ELs on content assessments are language-based accommodations, such as dictionaries, glossaries (when content-related terms are not included), and native language assessments. But for ELP assessment the focal construct is language, and language-based accommodations may not be valid. An accommodation is valid if it does not influence the performance of students who are not targeted for the accommodations (e.g., English proficient students). Dr. Abedi argued that only if the accommodations used do not change the construct can they be aggregated with the non-accommodated results.

Based on a comprehensive review of literature on the accommodations currently being used for ELs and students with disabilities, complemented by expert input and advice, a “Research-Based Decision Algorithm” was developed to guide states, districts, test developers, and test publishers in selecting appropriate accommodations for ELs and students with disabilities. The system uses a coding system to identify accommodations that are supported by research and experts and those that are not. Examples of the coding system are provided below:

- **Use:** Accommodation is supported by existing research as being effective in making assessments more accessible and valid (i.e., does not alter the focal construct) for ELs with disabilities or enhance the performance of students not targeted for the accommodation.

- **Use/Low Evidence:** No clear research evidence that the validity assumption is violated using this accommodation; however, additional evidence would strengthen acceptance in the field.
- **Do Not Use:** There is enough consistent research evidence suggesting an accommodation is not effective and alters the focal construct.
- **Unsure/Low Evidence:** Existing research evidence is supportive of the accommodation but not sufficient to make a judgment about its effectiveness and validity.
- **Unsure/Moderate Evidence:** Existing research evidence is not quite sufficient to make a judgment about effectiveness and validity of the accommodation; some additional research evidence is needed.
- **Unsure/High Evidence:** Existing research evidence neither supports nor rejects the effectiveness or validity of the accommodation; substantial research-based evidence is needed.

Figure 2 provides an example of the “Research-Based Decision Algorithm.” In this figure, research findings from three major sources consistently suggest that the “extra testing time” accommodation is effective in making assessments more accessible to ELs and students with disabilities without altering the focal construct. This accommodation was also suggested as an “accessibility feature” that can be used for all students.

Figure 2. Example of the Decision-Making Process About Whether to Use an EL Accommodation

EL Accommodation	Extra time within the testing day
Research Findings	This study indicated that extra time is both effective and valid for students in Grade 4 (Abedi, Courtney & Leon, 2003). Both EL and non-EL students in Grade 8 are helped by this accommodation on a mathematics assessment of 35 released NAEP items (Abedi, Hofstetter, Baker, & Lord, 2001). Highly rated by a team of experts as helpful for the lowest English language proficient students. (Acosta, Rivera & Willner, 2008).
Recommendation/ Validity	Use
Recommendation/ Effectiveness	Unsure/ Moderate Evidence
Overall Decision	Use – Access

Dr. Phoebe Winter presented about accessibility and accommodations on ELPA21, an ELP assessment being developed by a multi-state consortium. The assessment is based on the *English Language Proficiency Standards*, developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) with WestEd and the Understanding Language group at Stanford (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2014). ELPA21 was designed from the ground up to be as accessible as possible. Items and the platform were developed with universal design for learning (UDL) principles and accessibility features and accommodations in mind, and experts in educating and assessing students with disabilities worked on all aspects of the assessment. In addition to

offering accessibility features and accommodations, the assessment was developed to minimize language-related barriers stemming from language domains that are not the target of measurement for a particular task. Accessibility strategies include (1) pictures and graphics that are developed to be accessible to visually impaired students and students who are colorblind; and (2) multiple modes of presentation following UDL principles—for example, text-based items other than reading items can also be delivered via audio (self-controlled for older students). Non-verbal response modes are also used when appropriate (e.g., drag and drop).

A parallel assessment is being developed for blind or visually impaired students who cannot take the general assessment. This parallel assessment measures the same standards as the general ELPA21 and is designed to provide scores that are comparable in terms of acquisition of academic English. The form is as parallel in structure as possible to the standard ELPA21. For example, it minimizes dependence on language skills other than those being assessed, the computer is used as much as possible for administration, and the items are designed to be engaging and motivating.

Dr. Gary Cook, Director of the WIDA consortium, presented on the accommodations in ACCESS 2.0. Some previously labeled accommodations (for the ACCESS for ELs test) are now available to all ELs to ensure greater accessibility and ease of test administration. The test can be administered online but also in paper-and-pencil form. The advantage of taking the online test is related to the accessibility principles, which have been used to add multi-modality of the items, as well as to the universal tools that have been embedded within the test platform. Dr. Cook emphasized that decisions about accommodations should be based on the needs of individual students, as determined by the student's IEP team, or by the 504 coordinator.

In ACCESS 2.0, universal design for learning (UDL) principles have been applied to test items during the development phase to move them from paper formats to a more three-dimensional online form. As part of this process, the WIDA team has tried to ensure that the items are very user friendly and balance the accessibility enhancements with usability concerns. For example, the team worked to ensure that all the information students need to answer a question is included on the screen; that navigation components always appear in the same place on the screen; and that stimulus pictures and text, item stems, and response options appear in predictable locations, with limited variation allowed to accommodate differences in text length, number of response options, and degree of graphic support. During cognitive labs, ELs reported being generally familiar with computers and did not have major issues with using them.

Dr. Cook summarizes the new accessibility and accommodation framework as providing the following benefits:

1. More valid design and delivery of embedded accommodations and accessibility features
2. Increased accessibility support for all ELs
3. More precise definition for test administration considerations, accessibility features, and accommodations

Dr. Cook noted that the lack of composite scores affect Annual Measureable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs). More specifically, for some ELs with disabilities, disability prevents

participation in all four domain assessments—for example, deaf (listening) or blind (reading writing) students—and without participating in all domains, it is difficult to determine a composite. States vary in their approach to this problem—some do not provide composites, while others average the scores they do have, but ultimately there is not much guidance on identifying the English proficiency level for these students. Potential solutions might be to create conjunctive expectations based on administered tests, or to create alternate composite scores, which can be used to reclassify as English proficient English learners with disabilities who cannot participate on all domain tests.

Panel 2 Discussion

A moderated discussion took place after the first two presentations and again after the second two presentations. An open forum where questions were taken from the audience and those streaming the event online followed the final discussion.

In the panel discussion in response to the presentations, Dr. Thurlow described a need to shift to accessibility features that students can choose. Dr. Cook mentioned Smarter Balance found it was hard to know what accommodations students used. Dr. Winter explained that it is important to consider how a system collects and stores data. Panelist Dr. Gong asked the presenters how, for students who are allowed to choose their own accommodations/features, the data are validated, and whether there should be consideration given to validating by class of students or student level. The panel had no definitive answers, but Dr. Abedi argued that it is time to provide guidance to states on what the experts recommend now and what additional research is needed.

The discussion then moved to accommodating different constructs. Dr. Thurlow mentioned that for some constructs, accommodations may have little evidence of effectiveness, but still be low risk. Dr. Winter stated that questions such as the following might be asked: What are we testing? How will we use the test information—to determine teacher or school effectiveness, or make decisions about student placement and programming?

For additional information and to see sample items of ELPA21, visit: <http://ELPA21.org>

For additional information about WIDA, visit: <https://www.wida.us/>

Dr. Cook explained that text size should not be considered an accommodation—because it is about processing, not reading. However, multiple listening formats can affect the construct of listening comprehension. The field is moving toward more integrated assessments—speaking and listening becoming oral language, and reading and writing becoming literacy.

Dr. Thurlow mentioned that the field can learn from students with significant disabilities who use eye tracking rather than other communication systems. Dr. August asked Dr. Winter how the ELPA21 items and accommodations align with English language arts standards. Dr. Winter

replied that the ELPA21 items map to the College and Career Ready standards. The ELPA21.org website has additional sample items that make this correspondence more evident. Dr. Abedi asked if it were possible to derive composite scores using three domains. Dr. Thurlow explained that states currently calculate composites using varying approaches, and that these approaches may vary by grade.

In the open forum, Jill Eichner from the Department of Education asked what will be done in the area of accommodations for deaf/hard of hearing students. Dr. Winter responded by saying that ELPA21 has been thinking about it, and is starting to work on it. They have come to consensus on testing blind/visually impaired students. The accommodations for students who are deaf or hard of hearing seem to be more controversial. Dr. Thurlow added that ASL is generally viewed as a separate language, but that there is some difference of opinion. Dr. Cook reiterated that it is important to know what is being measured and to make sure that the accommodation not alter the focal construct. Dr. Iglesias asked if there was any work being done related to eye tracking for motor impairments. Dr. Cook explained that this has not been undertaken yet; Dr. Winter believed it would be an important line of inquiry, though new funding would be needed.

Panel 2 Key Takeaways

- Based on decisions about constructs, guidance needs to be developed for obtaining total English language proficiency scores for ELs with disabilities. No student should be denied a language proficiency score because of his or her disability.
- More training is needed on appropriate IEP team decision making related to accommodations for ELs with disabilities. The IEP team must include professionals who know English language development.
- It is important to provide access to an English proficiency assessment in a way that allows students with language-involved disabilities to be measured on their ELP, without altering the language construct that is the target of measurement, by building accessibility into test design up front and by providing appropriate accommodations. The primary purpose of the test (e.g., providing a measure of the student's ELP that will be used for placement; evaluating the student's language acquisition growth for accountability) can affect which tools and accommodations are appropriate.
- An ELP assessment for blind students and others with low vision who cannot take the general test can be developed to measure the same standards as those measured by the general test; depending on the base assessment, this will likely take more than simply converting items straight to braille or audio formats. The concept of item twins is a valuable tool for this process.
- Accommodations are intended to support better measurement of educational constructs for students with disabilities. It is important to understand the construct being measured and what appropriate accommodations are, especially when the construct is ELP.
- There are methods to create overall ELP scores for students with disabilities who cannot take all domain sub-tests. These methods provide analogous relationships between English language proficiency and content performance.

- Decisions for selecting accommodations for ELs and students with disabilities must be based on solid evidence from research and experts.
- Accommodations that are not effective in making assessments more accessible for the recipients may introduce additional sources of construct-irrelevant variance into the assessment outcomes.
- Accommodations that alter the focal construct or provide an unfair advantage to the recipients threaten the validity of the assessment outcomes.
- The outcome of assessments under invalid accommodations cannot be aggregated with the non-accommodated assessments.

Research and Data Needs

- Better national and state data on ELs with disabilities are needed, including information on their disabilities, language background, assessment participation, and proficiency.
- Additional research is needed on accommodations that may be appropriate for students whose disability interacts with the construct being measured (e.g., what does listening mean for a student who is deaf/hard of hearing? What does reading mean for a student who is blind/visually impaired? What does speaking mean for a student who has been deaf from birth or who has a speech impediment? What does writing mean for a student who has a significant motor disability?)

Panel Session 3: Assessing ELs With Significant Cognitive Disabilities—ELP Standards and Assessment, and Growth and Attainment Criteria

Panel 3 Overview

In the final session, panelists discussed what we know about ELs who have significant cognitive disabilities, implications of current instructional practices for assessment of this population, how IEP teams determine when an alternate ELP assessment is appropriate, characteristics of ELP standards and assessment for this population, and measuring progress for ELs in this group.

Panel 3 Presentations

Dr. Martha Thurlow presented considerations from the field regarding alternate assessments of ELP for ELs with significant cognitive disabilities. She discussed the lessons we have learned from alternate assessments for academic content areas. Most students participating in assessments based on alternate achievement standards (AA-AAS) can use oral speech, read sight words, and perform math with a calculator; about 72 percent are symbolic language users with expressive communication. Among a sample of ELs with significant cognitive disabilities, about 61 percent used symbolic language and 23 percent used intentional communication. More instructional strategies are needed to help such students learn more than “rote academic skills.” Cross-cultural considerations should be taken into account when planning instruction and assessment for these students. An alternate assessment of ELP should correspond to strong college and career readiness standards of ELP, should allow students who cannot be assessed on all domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) to earn a score and demonstrate proficiency in English, and should allow ELs with significant cognitive disabilities to demonstrate proficiency in English, with solid reclassification criteria based on alternate performance criteria.

Dr. Gary Cook presented “What we’re learning from Alt ACCESS about assessing ELs with significant cognitive disabilities.” Alternate ACCESS for ELs (Alt ACCESS) is designed to assess ELs with significant cognitive disabilities and is based on WIDA’s Alternate Model Performance Indicators (AMPs). His team is examining attainment data for their sample to identify English proficient performance criteria with reference to the state’s alternate assessment. They are also examining growth by proficiency level and grade clusters. It appears that many students are not progressing in English language proficiency; we need to learn how long it would take these students to attain proficiency (AMAO 2), what growth we should expect for these students (AMAO 1), and whether or not lack of growth could at some point suggest that Title III services are no longer helpful. We also need to consider how schools identify ELs with significant cognitive disabilities.

Panel 3 Discussion

During the moderated discussion, Robert Linqanti asked the presenters to clarify the extent to which we can alter ELP standards, which are different from content standards because they incorporate performance. He asked Dr. Thurlow to clarify how, in the case of the academic content alternate assessments she discussed, we do not alter grade-level content standards but do lower achievement standards. He also asked Dr. Cook if it is fair to say that the alternate model indicators he described are alternate standards. Dr. Cook did not think this issue had been resolved, but he did think there are expectations of levels of performance for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Robert Linqanti suggested that using the regular WIDA standards would have resulted in very different outcomes for these students, and Dr. Cook believed this was likely the case. Robert Linqanti argued that this seemed to imply some level of alternate ELP standards. Dr. Thurlow said it might, but she would need to further examine the ELP standards. She described two approaches that have been used for developing content standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities by the two consortia— Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) and the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) Partnership. These new alternate assessments will be aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and are expected to fit coherently within the comprehensive assessment systems under development by the federal grant recipients: the Partnership for Assessment Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced).² DLM mapped content to examine interconnections and determine the precursor skills and the scaffolding that would enable students to access grade-level content. NCSC looks at learning progressions thought to lead to grade-level standards, identifying and prioritizing the critical skills and knowledge that will allow a student to move to the next level. This process allows for a focus on a narrower set of standards. Similar approaches could be explored for ELP standards.

Dr. Cook indicated that this was a difficult and currently unanswered issue, although it could be argued that these are alternate performance standards. Experts are still asking whether or not we can really have alternate ELP standards for ELs with significant cognitive disabilities. So far, the Alt ACCESS sample has been composed of, in order of prevalence, students with a primary disability category of autism, cognitive disability, no disability selected, significant developmental delay, and other health impairment. He thinks the first year of testing revealed a lack of understanding of how and for whom the instrument should be used. Many students included in the sample should not have taken this test, skewing results toward higher scores. He thinks that in the second year they have a more appropriate sample as they continue to learn from test administration. Dr. Thurlow pointed out that many ELs with significant cognitive disabilities have had very little opportunity to learn. Dr. Cook recalled the videos Dr. Thurlow had shared, discussing the need to better understand how kinesics and semiotics fit into our idea of language proficiency for this population. He and Dr. Thurlow discussed the example of a student whose instruction had always been focused on functional skills because educators had not identified a

² Information retrieved from http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Digital_Resources/1_Percent_Assessment_Consortia_Webinar.html

way to accurately assess his capability. Once the iPad allowed him to better express his knowledge, he was able to demonstrate a substantial amount of science content knowledge he had learned from watching television. Dr. Geva noted that given the strong relationship between cognition and language, students with severe cognitive disabilities may learn only a few content words after months of one-on-one instruction, and asked about the implications of this for assessment and intervention. Dr. Thurlow acknowledged the difficulty of these situations and suggested the example of Shelley was a good illustration, as Shelley was only beginning to communicate with a switch, not yet with words, and needed a different communication system.

When the audience was asked for questions, one attendee asked Dr. Cook if he could match test results to state files on disability status when teacher reports were not complete. Dr. Cook said they did have information from state data sets, but that there was some information loss. Dr. Iglesias pointed out that many students will have a secondary disability, and he was particularly looking for the speech and language problems that could co-occur with the reported primary disabilities. Dr. Cook said they have collected data on secondary and tertiary disabilities, but they have only recently received the data, which have not yet been analyzed. Dr. Thurlow suggested the need to systematically examine the impact on growth of instruction, including special education services and rich language and academic experiences. Dr. Cook reported that lower grades grew at a faster rate and that he does think program implementation could have a huge impact on growth rates. Dr. August asked if growth patterns vary by disability category. Dr. Cook said they are looking into this, but analyses are not completed. Dr. August again brought up the boy who could not express his knowledge before accessing a communication system using an iPad, asking if the assessments being used are really tapping into what such students are learning and acquiring. Dr. Cook said we must consider other ways to express knowledge, including semiotics and kinesthetics. Dr. Ortiz asked if we can compare the performance of students receiving bilingual or native language instruction to those who only receive instruction in English. Dr. Thurlow said that one challenge is that these students are often in a separate special education classroom, with teachers who usually do not have a background in ESL and rarely coordinate with ESL teachers. Dr. Ortiz pointed out that ELP only gives you a piece of the puzzle, and that therefore we should look beyond teachers for alternate sources of native language supports. She noted that once students establish the conceptual base, the next step is learning to express it in English, but it may be very difficult for students with significant cognitive disabilities to add a second language when they struggle in their first language.

Dr. Cook reported that in their work, it has been difficult to classify the programs of supports that tested students are receiving because teachers often provide little information for this field. They are looking into changing categories to obtain better information. Dr. Cook suggested that we need to consider what construct we are really measuring, because students know more than we can currently measure. Dr. Abedi asked about the comparability of multiple measures of the same construct, and how these measures can help us make better decisions about ELs. Dr. Thurlow suggested that, ultimately, our goal should be to combine the results. We want to identify which students need alternate assessments and then support those students in meeting

standards. Dr. Cook pointed out, however, that we must be careful with these difficult topics and decisions, given the current limitations of our measurement methods and data sets.

Panel 3 Key Takeaways

- An alternate assessment of ELP for ELs with significant cognitive disabilities needs to be based on the strong ELP and college and career readiness standards.
- An alternate assessment of ELP for ELs with significant cognitive disabilities needs to be well thought out in how it addresses the assessment of the domains of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, so that those with disabilities in one or more areas can still earn a score and demonstrate proficiency.
- An alternate assessment of ELP for ELs with significant cognitive disabilities needs to be designed so that ELs with significant cognitive disabilities can demonstrate proficiency in English, with solid reclassification criteria based on alternate performance criteria.
- While we can create alternate English language proficiency assessments applying methods used for Title I alternate English language arts assessments, questions still prevail about what it is we are measuring. What does it mean to be “proficient” in English for students with significant cognitive disabilities? What types of expectations (vis-à-vis ELP standards) should we have for these students?
- Empirical methods currently used to establish Title III accountability (i.e., AMAO 1 and AMAO 2) with ELP assessments seem to work similarly with alternate ELP assessments.

Research and Data Needs

- Better data are needed on the characteristics of ELs with significant cognitive disabilities, in part to ensure that they are not inappropriately identified as having significant disabilities.

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Appendix A: Meeting Agenda

Assessing the English Language Proficiency of English Learners with Disabilities

Monday, March 16, 2015, 9:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.

U.S. Department of Education, LBJ Auditorium, 400 Maryland Ave SW, Washington, DC

Agenda

All panel sessions will be streamed and open to ED staff and the public.

9:00–9:15 Welcome and Overview

Welcome and meeting goals (Marianna Vinson, Assistant Deputy Director, Office of English Language Acquisition)

Agenda, introductions, and overview of the topic (Diane August, AIR)

9:15–11:05 Panel Session 1: Background—Differentiating Language and Literacy Acquisition from Disability

Key Concept

The first panel focuses on how to differentiate between English learners (ELs) who have specific learning disabilities or speech/language impairments and those who may appear so only because they are in the process of acquiring English.

Topics of Focus

- Methods/measures to determine whether ELs have specific learning disabilities or speech/language impairments
- Differences in methods/measures based on level of language proficiency and age
- Benchmarks/comparison groups used to determine adequate progress

Moderator: Diane August

Presenters

9:15–9:35: Aquiles Iglesias—*Identification of speech/language impairment in ELs*

9:35–9:55: Esther Geva—*Assessing disabilities in ELs struggling with phonological processing, word recognition, decoding, and spelling skills*

9:55–10:05: Moderated discussion

10:05–10:25: Sylvia Linan-Thompson—*A comparison of global and discrete measures when assessing ELs' writing*

10:25–10:45: Alba Ortiz—*Multi-tiered systems of support for English learners*

10:45–10:55: Moderated discussion

10:55–11:05: Questions from the audience

11:05–11:15 Break

11:15–1:05 Panel Session 2: Fostering Valid and Reliable ELP Assessments for ELs With Disabilities

Key Concept

The second panel focuses on valid and reliable ways to determine ELs' English language proficiency levels in the domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; the focus will be on ELs who have specific learning disabilities or speech/language impairments and those with vision or hearing impairments.

Topics of Focus

- Fostering valid and reliable methods for assessing English language proficiency of (1) ELs who have specific learning disabilities or speech/language impairments, and (2) ELs whose major mode of communication in one or more domains is not text- or speech-based (e.g., braille, American Sign Language)
- Creating composite scores for EL students who do not take all components of an assessment
- Methods for assuring comparability of ELP test scores administered with different accommodations

Moderator: Robert Linquanti

Presenters

11:15–11:35: Martha Thurlow—*Assessing the English language proficiency of ELs with disabilities: Implications from research and practice*

11:35–11:55: Jamal Abedi—*ELP assessment accommodations for ELs with disabilities: Relevance, effectiveness, feasibility, and validity*

11:55–12:05: Moderated discussion

12:05–12:25: Phoebe Winter—*Accessibility and accommodations on ELPA21*

12:25–12:45: Gary Cook—*WIDA Consortium, ACCESS 2.0: Accommodations for ELs with disabilities*

12:45–12:55: Moderated discussion

12:55–1:05: Questions from the audience

1:05–2:00 Lunch

2:00–3:00 Panel Session 3: Assessing ELs With Significant Cognitive Disabilities—ELP Standards and Assessments,* and Growth and Attainment Criteria

*Alternate ELP standards and assessments apply to students with the most severe cognitive disabilities.

Key Concept

The third panel focuses on understanding alternate ELP standards, developing items and assembling test forms based on these standards, developing ELP descriptors and setting cut scores, and setting growth and attainment criteria.

Topics of Focus

- What we know about ELs who have significant cognitive disabilities
- Implications of current instructional practices for assessment of this population
- Issues in developing alternate ELP standards
- How IEP teams determine when an alternate ELP assessment is appropriate
- Characteristics of alternate ELP standards and assessment is appropriate
- Measuring progress for ELs in this group

Moderator: Brian Gong

Presenters

- 2:00–2:20: Martha Thurlow—*Alternate assessments of ELP for ELs with significant cognitive disabilities: Considerations from the field*
- 2:20–2:40: Gary Cook—*What we're learning from Alt ACCESS about assessing ELs with significant cognitive disabilities*
- 2:40–2:50: Moderated discussion
- 2:50–3:00: Questions from the audience

3:00 **Adjourn**

Appendix B: Staff and Panelists

U.S. Department of Education

Name	Affiliation
Supreet Anand	Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Leticia Braga	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
Melissa Escalante	Office of English Language Acquisition
Marianna Vinson	Office of English Language Acquisition

American Institutes for Research

Name	Affiliation
Diane August	AIR
Lauren Artzi	AIR
Clare Halloran	AIR
Laura Kuchle	AIR

Meeting Presenters/Discussants

Name	Affiliation
Jamal Abedi	University of California, Davis
Diane August	American Institutes for Research
Alba Ortiz	University of Texas at Austin
H. Gary Cook	University of Wisconsin–Madison
Esther Geva	University of Toronto
Brian Gong	Center for Assessment
Aquiles Iglesias	University of Delaware
Sylvia Linan-Thompson	University of Texas at Austin
Robert Linqanti	WestEd
Martha Thurlow	National Center on Educational Outcomes
Phoebe Winter	Consultant in Assessment Research and Development

APPENDIX C: Panelist Cameos

Jamal Abedi (University of California, Davis)

Jamal Abedi is a Professor of Educational Measurement at the University of California, Davis. His research interests include studies in the areas of psychometrics and test development, and his recent work includes studies on the validity of assessment, accommodation, and classification for English learners (ELs) and ELs with disabilities. He serves on assessment advisory boards for a number of states and assessment consortia as an expert in testing ELs. Dr. Abedi is the recipient of the 2003 *Outstanding Contribution Relating Research to Practice* award by the American Educational Research Association, the 2008 *Lifetime Achievement Award* by the California Educational Research Association, the 2013 National Association of Test Directors: *Outstanding Contribution to Educational Assessment*, and the 2014 University of California, Davis: *Distinguished Scholarly Public Service Award*.

Diane August (American Institutes for Research)

Diane August is a Managing Researcher at the American Institutes for Research (AIR). At AIR she is responsible for directing the English learner work for the Education Program. Her area of expertise is policy, research, and technical assistance related to the education of pre-school and school-age second-language learners. Dr. August brings 40 years of experience in the many aspects of educating language-minority children. Prior to her position at AIR, she was a Senior Research Scientist at the Center for Applied Linguistics, where she directed federally funded studies related to the development of literacy and science in English learners. She has been a Senior Program Officer at the National Academy of Sciences and has worked as a teacher, school administrator, legislative assistant, Grants Officer for the Carnegie Corporation, and Director of Education for the Children's Defense Fund.

H. Gary Cook (Wisconsin Center for Education Research)

H. Gary Cook directs research for the WIDA Consortium and is a research scientist attached to the Wisconsin Center for Education Research. He has served in educational leadership and research positions in private industry, in an urban public school district, in a state department of education, and at the university level. He is an experienced Federal Peer Reviewer for ESEA and serves on several state and national technical advisory committees. His recent research and publication interests have focused on the relationship between English proficiency and content assessments, standards alignment, policy issues associated with Title III accountability, and applying growth modeling techniques to address key educational questions for English learners.

Esther Geva (University of Toronto)

Esther Geva is Full Professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto. Professor Geva works in the broad area of educational psychology and multiculturalism. Her research, publications, and teaching focus on (a) developmental issues and best practices concerning language and literacy skills in children from various immigrant and minority backgrounds, including children who immigrate from non-literate countries, (b) language and literacy skills in normally developing learners and learners with learning difficulties, and (c) cross-cultural perspectives on children's psychological problems and well-being. Professor Geva is a Canadian Council on Learning Minerva Scholar. A book that she co-

authored with her colleague J. Wiener, *Psychological Assessment of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children*, has recently been published by Springer.

Brian Gong (Center for Assessment)

Brian Gong is Executive Director of the non-profit National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment (Center for Assessment), which provides technical assistance to improve assessment and accountability systems. The Center for Assessment currently has contracts with over 25 states and several districts, and frequently has been invited to consult with the U.S. Department of Education, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and other educational agencies. In that capacity, the Center deals with the full range of states' operational large-scale assessment and accountability programs. Dr. Gong has worked with several states on assessments for students with disabilities, primarily from the viewpoint of validity and innovative assessments. He is currently working on several projects dealing with developing conceptualization and tools to support the evaluation of the quality of educational assessments.

Aquiles Iglesias (University of Delaware)

Aquiles Iglesias is the Founding Director and Chair of the Communication Sciences and Disorders program at the University of Delaware. Dr. Iglesias' major research focus is in language acquisition in bilingual (Spanish/English) children. He is the author of over 60 research articles and over 150 national and international presentations. In addition, he has developed three widely used language development tests. He is presently involved in an IES-funded project designed to develop a computerized language assessment of 3–5 year old English and Spanish-speaking children. In 2009, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) awarded Dr. Iglesias "Honors," the highest award of the association.

Sylvia Linan-Thompson (University of Texas at Austin)

Sylvia Linan-Thompson is an Associate Professor at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research interests include examining appropriate instructional and assessment practices for English learners in kindergarten to eighth grade. She has also developed and examined reading interventions for struggling readers who are monolingual English speakers, English learners, and bilingual students acquiring Spanish literacy. Dr. Linan-Thompson has also examined the utility and validity of assessments with different populations. She is currently the principal investigator on a model demonstration project examining the implementation of RtI with English learners in dual language schools. She has authored articles, chapters, and books on these topics and has also developed instructional guides.

Robert Linqunti (WestEd)

Robert Linqunti is Senior Researcher at WestEd, specializing in assessment, evaluation, and accountability policies, practices and systems for ELs. He conducts research, provides technical assistance, and advises educational leaders and policymakers on these topics at the national, state, and local levels. In his current work he supports state and local implementation of new content and ELP standards and assessments, and advises states on more common policies and processes for defining ELs. He recently coauthored a U.S. Department of Education study to define and measure EL linguistic and academic progress; several guidance publications for the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to help states move toward a more common

definition of EL; and a policy primer for CCSSO on supporting formative assessment for deeper learning.

Alba Ortiz (University of Texas at Austin)

Alba Ortiz is Professor Emeritus at the University of Texas at Austin (UT). During her tenure at UT, she served as the Coordinator of the Multicultural Special Education Program and as Director of the Office of Bilingual Education. She also held the President's Chair for Education Academic Excellence, an honor bestowed by the university in recognition of her research and scholarly contributions to the bilingual education and special education fields. Dr. Ortiz is a Past President of the Council for Exceptional Children and is currently the coeditor of the Bilingual Research Journal. She is a nationally recognized expert on the education of English learners with language and learning disabilities, and on prevention and early intervention for second language learners experiencing achievement difficulties.

Martha Thurlow (National Center on Educational Outcomes)

Martha Thurlow is Director of the National Center on Educational Outcomes. She addresses the implications of contemporary U.S. policy and practice for students with disabilities and English learners with disabilities. Dr. Thurlow has a broad range of experience and expertise on policy and practice issues that affect students with disabilities and those who are English learners. During the past decade, she has been the principal investigator on more than 20 federal and state projects focused on students with special needs in state and national policies and in large-scale accountability assessments, including graduation exams. Dr. Thurlow has given particular emphasis to how to obtain valid, reliable, and comparable measures of the knowledge and skills of these students while ensuring that assessments are truly measuring their knowledge and skills, not measuring their disabilities or limited English when these are not the focus of the assessment.

Phoebe Winter

Phoebe Winter is an independent consultant whose research focuses on improving the validity of inferences from large-scale assessments, with an emphasis on accurately assessing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of students with disabilities and English learners. She has worked in the development of and conducted research about both online and paper-based assessments of English language proficiency. Her work with state and nongovernmental education agencies focuses on bringing policy, psychometric, and practical perspectives to the design and implementation of educational assessment and accountability programs. Dr. Winter's recent research addresses the comparability of inferences from tests administered under different conditions and the nature and degree of information provided by traditional and technology-enabled item types in mathematics and science.

APPENDIX D: Resources

Panel 1

Aquiles Iglesias

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Esther Geva

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Panel 2

Martha Thurlow

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Gary Cook

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Panel 3

Martha Thurlow

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