Achieving Accurate Results for Diverse Learners: Accommodations and Access Enhanced Item Formats for English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities

The overall goal of the Achieving Accurate Results for Diverse Learners: Accommodations and Access Enhanced Item Formats for English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities (AARDL) project is to obtain more accurate results about the academic achievement of English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities (SWDs). AARDL proposes to empirically investigate strategies designed to increase access to test content for these students and others who may encounter barriers to demonstrating their knowledge of content areas and cognitive ability under regular testing conditions. The proposed study addresses all four of the absolute priorities laid out in the Request for Proposals as well as all three competitive preferences.

The AARDL project involves a consortium of states and jurisdictions including South Carolina, North Carolina, Maryland, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia who will collaborate with the University of Maryland, the University of Oregon, the University of South Carolina, Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) and SERVE. This diverse collaborative of state departments of education, research institutions, testing contractors and external evaluators will ensure that the project has a firm grounding in both theory and practice.

The main objectives of the AARDL project are to (1) develop Access Enhanced (AE) Items in four subject areas and 6 grade levels with accompanying scoring guides focusing on responses from diverse learners; (2) investigate the reliability and utility of the Accommodation Station; (3) determine the comparability and scalability of the Access Enhanced (AE) Items; and (4) disseminate results through reports and a handbook for developing AE items. The results of the AARDL will provide an important contribution to the growing body of research into providing appropriate testing accommodations for those students for whom regular testing conditions pose a barrier to accessing content. New strategies such as the ones AARDL investigates are critical to the valid, reliable, and accurate assessment of English language learners and students with disabilities. Having accurate results for these and all students is essential to ensure the accountability of the educational system, determine how to best meet students' educational needs, and track student progress over time.