

The Alternate ACCESS for ELLs with Significant Disabilities

The Washington, DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), on behalf of the 17-state World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) Consortium, recently received an Enhanced Assessment Grant to develop and implement a feasible, accessible, valid, and efficient standards-based English language proficiency (ELP) alternate assessment system that yields technically sound results and facilitates the inclusion of English language learners (ELLs) with significant disabilities in educational accountability systems across the WIDA Consortium. This performance-based alternate assessment system will compliment and parallel the University of Wisconsin – Madison and WIDA’s evidence-based collection alternate ELP approach that is currently being field-tested within WIDA Consortium states. This new performance-based approach will give WIDA states the flexibility to implement alternate ELP assessments consistent with their existing alternate academic content assessments. The WIDA Consortium, which is located within the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, will lead the development of this assessment through a cooperative agreement with the Washington, DC OSSE.

The alternate ELP assessment system, named the *Alternate ACCESS for ELLs with Significant Disabilities*, is being designed to (a) meet the accountability requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, (b) meet the technical requirements of the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999), (c) facilitate the involvement of ELLs in participating states’ accountability systems, (d) provide a method for monitoring the ELP growth of ELLs with significant disabilities, and (e) provide guidance to individualized education program (IEP) teams in developing appropriate language proficiency IEP goals and objectives.

The development of this parallel form of the *Alternate ACCESS for ELLs* is following key principles that require the assessment to (a) identify and assess skills that are critical to language proficiency development; (b) be aligned with the WIDA Consortium’s language proficiency standards; (c) be sensitive to student growth and accurately reflect students’ abilities in language areas; (d) lead to instructional opportunities that meet student needs; (e) provide reliable and valid results; (f) be non-biased and sensitive to cultural differences; (g) produce results that are helpful to teachers, parents, and administrators in making educational decisions; and (h) be time- and resource-efficient, as well as consistent with participating WIDA Consortium states’ existing academic content alternate assessment systems. A multi-part investigation using a multi-method, multi-source approach to developing and evaluating the alternate assessment is being used.

Although a variety of academic content assessments are available for use with ELLs with significant disabilities, there currently exist no alternate ELP assessments for ELL students with significant disabilities. Consequently, this project will advance theory, knowledge, and practice in the fields of assessment and instructional programs for ELLs with significant disabilities. We anticipate that the development and use of alternate ELP assessments for ELLs in the beginning stages of English language acquisition will prove to be a valid, reliable, and equitable way to assess the English language proficiency of ELLs with significant disabilities.

For additional information about the project, please contact the principal investigator, Craig A. Albers at the University of Wisconsin – Madison (caalbers@wisc.edu).