

Improving Methods of Aligning Instruction to Standards and Assessments for English Language Learners and Analyzing the Relationship of Alignment to Student Achievement

With Iowa serving as the lead state, a consortium of nine states – Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Ohio, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin – in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the University of Wisconsin’s Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER), edCount, LLC, and WestEd, was awarded an Enhanced Assessment Grant by the U.S. Department of Education in October 2007. The Consortium proposed a unique project integrating research, development, collaboration, and technical assistance to improve the quality and validity of state assessments designed to assess the knowledge and skills of English language learners (ELL).

The project goals and design stemmed from states’ recognition of the need for research-based information to guide improved instruction for English language learner students and to assist states in aligning standards, assessments and instruction as they apply to ELLs. The project proposal was developed from prior development work of the CCSSO ELL State Collaborative project and the SEC State Collaborative project. The project design was also based on the states’ recognition of the potential applications of the Surveys of Enacted Curriculum (SEC) model and tools - which have been applied in more than 30 states for alignment studies and analyses of instructional alignment in several academic subjects - towards the objective in this project of analyzing alignment issues for ELL instruction, assessments, and standards.

The research and analysis component of the project will result in analyses of the alignment of instruction, standards and assessments for ELL students in consortium member states. The analyses and reports will provide the foundation for targeted technical assistance within consortium states for improving instruction aligned to standards for ELL students and helping schools to raise academic achievement for these students. All states will benefit from the project results and products through gains in knowledge about alignment issues among state standards and assessments related to ELL and their relationship to classroom instruction, solutions for improving alignment and validity of ELL assessments in relation to standards from work with experts and cross-state collaboration, improvements in research designs and tools for research and reporting data about ELL instruction and assessment, and cross-state research on the relationship between aligned instruction and gains in ELL student achievement.

The following key questions help form the goals for the study design with states, and to structure the project assistance based on study data for participating states and school districts:

1. To what extent do English language learners have opportunity to learn the subject content specified in state academic standards and assessed on state assessments?
2. What is the relationship of academic English language development standards and assessments to state academic standards?
3. What instructional practices and strategies are used to teach academic English language skills across different subject areas or courses?
4. What is the relationship between alignment of instruction to standards and improved academic achievement of English language learner students?

For further information, contact the Project Director, Rolf Blank, Council of Chief State School Officers, 202 336 7044; rolfb@ccsso.org.