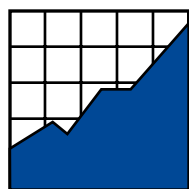


**Large-Scale Assessments and English
Language Learners with Disabilities:
A Case Study of Participation,
Performance, and Perceptions**

“Walking the Talk!”



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In collaboration with:

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)

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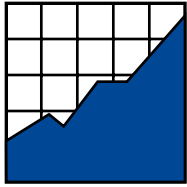
“Walking the Talk!”

Jane E. Minnema • Martha L. Thurlow • Gretchen R. VanGetson •
Rene Jimenez

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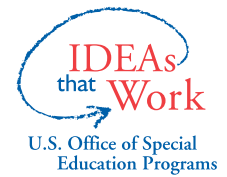
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**N A T I O N A L
C E N T E R O N
E D U C A T I O N A L
O U T C O M E S**

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NCEO Core Staff

Deb A. Albus	Michael L. Moore
Manuel T. Barrera	Rachel F. Quenemoen
Christopher J. Johnstone	Dorene L. Scott
Jane L. Krentz	Karen E. Stout
Kristi K. Liu	Martha L. Thurlow, Director
Ross E. Moen	

National Center on Educational Outcomes
University of Minnesota • 350 Elliott Hall
75 East River Road • Minneapolis, MN 55455
Phone 612/626-1530 • Fax 612/624-0879
<http://www.nceo.info>

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Overview

The advent of standards-based reform during the past 10 years has ushered in a variety of challenges for policymakers and practitioners alike. Such concerns were accentuated by the legislative mandates of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act which required year-to-year academic performance to be measured by states' standards-based large-scale assessments for all subgroups of students in U.S. schools. While schools and their staff generally support the theory of action that underlies initiatives like NCLB, such as that explicated in *Testing, Teaching, and Learning* (Elmore & Rothman, 1999), it is still a challenge to provide instruction based on challenging, grade-level content standards. In addition, there is often a concern that some students, especially those with disabilities or limited English proficiency, may not be capable of achieving the academic content deemed appropriate for the grades in which they are enrolled in school. It is also suggested that these students are not able to fully participate in large-scale assessments that were designed for their peers. While concerns have been raised for students with disabilities as a subgroup and English language learners as a subgroup for some time, it is only recently that including students with both disabilities and English learning challenges in states' large-scale assessment and accountability programs have been considered.

With the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and NCLB, both of which clearly required that students with disabilities be included in state assessments, states are making progress toward including all students in their standards-based testing. Rates of participation for students with disabilities and English language learners have been improving over time (Thompson & Thurlow, 2003). However, there are few data that can demonstrate improved academic results for English language learners with disabilities. In fact, there are few sources of public data that report results for these students (Albus & Thurlow, 2005). Only recently, English language learners with disabilities have begun to receive marginal attention in the literature (Minnema, Thurlow, Anderson, & Stone, 2005). The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) has, for the past four years, conducted research on large-scale assessment and instructional issues for English language learners with disabilities, but neither NCEO's research nor any other research study has yet described large-scale assessment experiences at the local school level for English language learners with disabilities.

This study was designed, in part, to clarify some of the issues that surround including English language learners in states' large-scale assessment programs. More specifically, we gathered practical information at the local school level to understand these students' large-scale assessment experiences from a variety of perspectives, to describe the characteristics of English language learners with disabilities as well as the characteristics of their schools, and to make known the level of awareness that students and their families have about large-scale assessments.

State and Local Context

This study was conducted in a large western state with a total estimated population of 35,484,453 in 2003. The breakdown by ethnicity in 2000 was 59.5% White persons, 6.7% Black or African American persons, 1.0% American Indian and Alaska Native persons, 10.9% Asian persons, 0.3% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 16.8% persons reporting some other race, 4.7% persons reporting two or more races, 46.7% White persons, not of Hispanic/Latino origin, and 32.4% persons of Hispanic or Latino origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Across these subgroups, 26.2% were foreign born for an estimated total of 8,864,188. The region in which these individuals were born was Europe (7.9%, a total of 696,578), Asia (32.9%, a total of 2,918,642), Africa (1.3%, a total of 113,255), Oceania (0.8%, a total of 67,131), Latin America (55.6%, a total of 4,926,803), and North America (1.6%, a total of 141,779). Of those 5 years of age or older, 39.5% (a total of 31,416,629) of this state's population spoke a language other than English at home, 60.5% spoke only English at home, and 39.5% (a total of 12,401,756) spoke a language other than English at home. Again, as of 2000, there were 5,923,361 individuals in this state who were 5 years old or older.

The school district in which we collected data is an urban unified school district located in the southern region of the state. The district serves approximately 97,000 students in 95 public schools from four different cities. As the third largest school district in the state, it serves the most diverse large city in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). The students in the district speak 46 different languages and are required to wear school uniforms through grade 8. Any student at the end of grade 3 who is reading below grade level attends mandatory summer school, because the district no longer practices social promotion. This district was the first in the nation to introduce these district-wide reforms. Because of outstanding educational practices and student outcomes, this district recently received a national award for being one of the top urban school districts in the United States.

The Elementary School

The elementary school in which data were collected educates 1,204 students in kindergarten through grade 5. The school is located in a residential neighborhood on the west side of the city. Students represent a wide range of ethnic groups, including 73.9% Hispanic/Latino, 10.4% African-American, 9.8% Filipino-American, 2.4% Pacific Islander, 2.1% White (Not Hispanic), 1.3% Asian-American, and 0.1% American Indian or Alaska Native. A recent push for class size reduction has resulted in a teacher/student ratio of 1:20 in kindergarten through grade 3. The teacher/student ratio for grades 4 and 5 is 1:33. All 56 classrooms in the school are described on the school district Web site as staffed by dedicated teachers offering direct, explicit instruc-

tion in basic skills and higher level thinking skills. Students are instructed on the state content standards with the goal of every student achieving grade level expectations as defined by the state's performance standards. Standard proficiency is measured by the state's large-scale assessment program, district benchmark tests of basic mathematics facts, performance tasks in mathematics and writing, and student portfolios.

The Middle School

The middle school that participated in the research project serves 1,760 students in grades 6 through 8. It is a year-round neighborhood school in the northern area of the city that is noted for its cultural diversity. Students represent a wide range of ethnic groups that include 58.8% Hispanic/Latino, 26.1% African-American, 5.2% Asian-American, 4.8% Pacific Islander, 3.9% White (Not Hispanic), 0.8% Filipino-American, 0.4% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.1% Other. The average class size at the middle school varies by subject area, from 31 in English classes to 40 in science classes. Daily goals for the students and staff are driven by the school's mission, "to educate all students to enable them to participate in their education and contribute to their school and society." Their education is guided by the district's content standards, and students recently met their targeted growth areas in reading, language, and mathematics according to the state academic performance index. Departmental and grade level teacher-developed tests are administered in addition to the state's large-scale program.

The High School

Data were collected in a high school that is a state distinguished school that educates 4,376 students in grades 9 through 12. The school operates under the vision that, the "high school will foster a positive and open atmosphere that guarantees academic success, enhances self-esteem, and promotes respect for others within a culturally diverse society." The diverse student body is comprised of 30.5% Asian-American, 29.2% African-American, 17.5% Hispanic/Latino, 13.1% White (Not Hispanic), 6.6% Filipino-American, 2.8% Pacific Islander, and 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native. In grade 9, each student is assigned to a four-year academy according to a particular field of interest. The academies include: math and science, business world preparation, media, visual performing and applied arts, special education, English language development, and a partnership academy. These academies prepare each student for a future at a four-year university. Vocational training is also available at this high school. Ultimately, the school curriculum is determined by state and district content standards. Students are assessed using the state large-scale assessment program and must pass the state high school exam to receive a high school diploma.

Students in grades 11 or 12 who wish to accelerate their studies in a focus on passing the high school exit exam may attend the upper division academy. This 18 classroom program is located one block off of the high school campus. Approximately 550 students attend this academy to take advantage of the accelerated instructional pace.

Students may complete a year long course in a semester, as each 10 unit class meets daily for 90 minutes. Instead of the typical 60 credits a year, these students may complete 80 plus credits each school year. Students at the upper division academy are able to participate in all activities offered to students at the high school, as well as additional activities special to the academy such as the student commission. The goal of this program is to graduate each student with regular high school diplomas.

Large-Scale Assessment Program

We collected data in a state where the large-scale assessment program for the school year 2003–2004 consisted of four core assessments: (1) a standards-based measure administered to students in grades 2 through 11 in English-language arts and mathematics, a written composition portion for students in grades 4 and 7, a history-social science portion for students in grades 8, 10, and 11 and a science portion administered to students in grade 5, 9, 10, and 11; (2) an alternate assessment that is designed for students with severe cognitive disabilities in grades 2 through 11 that assesses English-language arts and mathematic skills; (3) an “off-the-shelf” test that serves as the norm-referenced segment of the standards-based measure and that assesses skills in reading/language, spelling, and mathematics in grades 2 through 8, and reading/language, mathematics, and science in grades 9 through 11; and (4) a norm-referenced test used to assess Spanish-speaking students for primary language assessment component of the state’s large-scale assessment program. This test measures skills in reading, spelling, language, and mathematics for Spanish-speaking students in grades 2 through 11. These students must be identified as English language learners (ELLs) who have been in the states’ schools for less than 12 months.

Extending beyond the large-scale assessment program is an English language development test, that is a standards-based assessment of listening and speaking in grades kindergarten through 1, and listening, speaking, reading, and writing in grades 2 through 12. This assessment helps determine a student’s level of English language acquisition and comprehension. Lastly, the state requires students in grade 10 to take a state-developed standards-based high-stakes assessment of language arts and mathematics skills that students are required to pass in order to graduate from high school with a regular diploma.

Method

Research Questions

We addressed two broad research questions in our study:

- 1) What perceptions do educators, parents, and students have about the experiences of English language learners with disabilities who participate in large-scale assessments?
- 2) What are the characteristics of schools that test English language learners with disabilities in large-scale assessments?

Research Design

Our case study research design, in which one school is defined as a case, used a mixed method approach to collect quantitative and qualitative data from four sources of data. Data were collected on site in three schools and one alternative school program in a large urban school district located in a large western state.

Sample

Using a purposive sample, we included students with disabilities ($n = 24$), their parents ($n = 30$), special and general education teachers ($n = 72$), and administrators ($n = 5$). The schools from which our sample was drawn were recruited by the assistant superintendent of special education and the program specialist of special education/English language learners. Within each school, one staff member served as a contact person for the study. Their primary responsibility was to recruit parents and students for the face-to-face interviews. All participants received a gift card from a local department store as a thank you for their time invested in our research activities.

Instruments

We used a variety of self-developed data collection instruments that included a written survey, interview protocols, and document review data collection sheets (see Appendix A for copies of the survey and interview protocols).

Procedures

The written surveys were distributed in teachers' school mailboxes with a request to return the surveys to the school's main office by the end of that school day. As a follow up procedure, we worked with our contact person in each school to encourage those teachers who had not

responded on the first day to return their survey by the end of the week. In one school where we were unable to distribute the survey while working on-site, we mailed the surveys to the principal who distributed and collected them during a staff meeting.

Our face-to-face interviews with parents and teachers were conducted at school in either small groups or individually depending on the participants' preferences. Each interview was tape recorded for subsequent transcription and data analysis. An English speaking researcher conducted all of the school staff interviews. All of the parent interviews were conducted in Spanish except one where a Latina parent indicated that English was her dominant language. A bilingual researcher whose ethnic heritage was the same as the Spanish-speaking parents in our case study interpreted the Spanish and English for the English-speaking researcher who conducted the interviews. All three researchers interviewed the students in English according to their preferences. Students were interviewed at school during noninstructional time. Depending on the size of the group, teacher and parent interviews required from 30 to 45 minutes to complete with individual interviews requiring less time. Student interviews were typically less than 10 minutes in duration.

A school staff member was contracted to collect data for the document review of students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and cumulative files. Rather than conducting a direct review of students' files, the assistant director of special education requested to first gather any data available in the districts' computerized student information database. These variables included language assessment results, special education services, prior school history, attendance, behavior, and grades. If this information was missing in the district database, data were gathered from students' master special education files or cumulative files directly. We provided data collection sheets for this data collection activity that were completed and returned to us in the mail. Any follow up questions were answered by e-mail or telephone.

Data Analysis

To analyze our narrative data, we first transcribed all English portions of the educator and parent interviews verbatim. For the Spanish portions of our parent interviews, the bilingual researcher transcribed the Spanish data and then translated these data to English. All narrative data were then subjected to a content analysis that yielded themes of results. Throughout the qualitative analysis process, English data were compared back to Spanish translated data to ensure accuracy of our interpretations. We use both the original Spanish and the translated English for any supportive quotations taken from the parent interview data. Since the student interview responses were briefer than the parent and educator narrative data, these interviews were not tape recorded. Instead, student responses were written down during the interviews. To analyze the student interview data, we tabulated categories of responses rather than creating themes of results. We employed descriptive statistics to analyze the document review and survey data.

Findings

The findings from the document review, written survey, and face-to-face interviews are each presented in different formats. These varying organizational schemes allowed us to highlight the most interesting and useful findings from each data collection activity.

Document Review

For the document review, results are presented by school level so that we can understand each school at an individual student level. Data for nine students at the elementary level are presented with seven students' data at the middle school level and eight students' data at the high school level. Within each school level, student demographic and language assessment results are reported. Student demographic variables included grade level, grade promotion history, school transfer history, disability category, special education services, and school behavioral concerns. Unfortunately, data on the number of years spent in the U.S. and the country of origin, two variables listed on our original data collection protocol, were not available.

Language assessment results were comprised of proficiency levels from a standardized English proficiency measure that was used on a large-scale basis. A second English measure, which consisted of a series of checklists that were organized from levels 0–7, was completed by an educator familiar with a child's communicative patterns. The second instrument was used when the severity of an English language learner's disability prevented their participation in the large-scale assessment of English proficiency. These students were typically deaf, nonverbal, or significantly cognitively impaired.

Elementary School. The grade level, years enrolled in the district, disability category, and retention status for each elementary school student are presented in Table 1. These students were enrolled in 1st (n = 1), 2nd (n = 1), 4th (n = 4), and 5th (n = 3) grades. Three students had been retained at some point during elementary school. All but one of the students attended school in only this district since kindergarten. The remaining student enrolled in this school in the 4th grade, after attending elementary school in another city in the state for at least one year prior to moving into this district. Years of enrollment in this school district ranged from one to nine years.

The primary categories of six of these special education students at the elementary school were multiple disabilities (MD), while two students had specific learning disabilities (SLD) and one student had autism. Students with multiple disabilities received a variety of special education services that included a segregated special day class, adapted physical education, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and assistive technology services. Students with a specific learning disability received resource specialist services in reading, and the student with autism

participated in a segregated special day class as well as receiving speech and language therapy. Only one student was identified as having behavioral concerns.

Table 1. School Information for Elementary School Students

Student	Grade Level	Years in District	Disability	Retained
E1	1	3	MD	No
E2	2	3	SLD	No
E3	2	4	Autism	Kg
E4	4	1	SLD	Unknown
E5	4	8	MD	No
E6	4	9	MD	Kg
E7	5	6	MD	No
E8	5	8	MD	5th
E9	5	6	MD	No

The number of elementary students in each proficiency level based on the scores from the state developed English language proficiency test is presented in Table 2. Each student’s English language development was assessed in the areas of oral language, reading, and writing. They were scored as having beginning, early intermediate, intermediate, early advanced, or advanced emerging English. Generally speaking, most students’ proficiency levels were beginning and early intermediate for both the content areas and overall levels.

Two students were administered the Kendall Conversational Proficiency Levels (KCPL) test in lieu of the state English proficiency test due to the severity of the students’ disabilities. The KCPL measured expressive communicative competence, organized from level 0 to 7, via a series of checklists completed by one or more adults who were knowledgeable about the student’s communication patterns. The district used the KCPL as an alternative to the state English proficiency test for students who are deaf, non-verbal, or significantly cognitively impaired. The KCPL test results are in levels, which are then converted to the states’ English proficiency test descriptor scores. One student scored a KCPL level of 3, converted to an overall early intermediate English proficiency level and the other student scored a KCPL level of 0, converted to an overall beginning English proficiency level. These two students’ test results are only included in the overall category in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of Elementary School Students in English Proficiency Test Score Categories

Test Content Areas				
Proficiency Level	Oral	Reading	Writing	Overall
Beginning	1	2	0	2
Early Intermediate	2	2	3	3
Intermediate	2	0	1	1
Early Advanced	0	2	1	1
Advanced	2	0	0	1
Not Applicable	0	0	1	1
TOTAL	7	6	6	9

Middle School. The grade level, number of years enrolled in the district, disability category, and retention status for each middle school student is presented in Table 3. The students at the middle school were enrolled in 6th (n = 2), 7th (n = 3), and 8th (n = 2) grades and had attended school in this district from two to ten years.

Two of the 7 students had attended schools outside of the district in elementary school. One student had no school records prior to 3rd grade where the student presumably attended school in another country, attended 3rd through 5th grades at other schools in the U.S., and enrolled in this district in 6th grade. The other student attended elementary school in another city in the U.S. until being retained in 3rd grade. Upon enrollment in this district, the student repeated 3rd grade.

Most of the English language learners at the middle school had learning disabilities with one additional student who had an orthopedic impairment (OI). Four students had been retained at some point in their school history, and two of those students were retained twice. In terms of special education services, four students, including the student with an orthopedic impairment, attended a segregated special day class in the middle school. One of those students also received special transportation and behavioral intervention services. The other three students received resource specialist program services. Five students were reported as having some behavioral concerns.

Table 3. School Information for Students in Middle School

Student	Grade Level	Years in District	Disability	Retention
M1	6	6	OI	No
M2	6	9	SLD	3rd
M3	7	9	SLD	2nd and 5th
M4	7	2	SLD	No
M5	7	6	SLD	3rd and 4th
M6	8	10	SLD	2nd
M7	8	10	SLD	No

The number of middle school students in each proficiency level based on the scores from the state-developed English language proficiency test is presented in Table 4. In terms of English oral skills, the majority of students were at an early intermediate or intermediate level. Most students were functioning from beginning to intermediate levels of proficiency in reading and writing, which was true for the overall level as well.

Table 4. Number of Middle School Students in English Proficiency Test Score Categories

Test Content Areas				
Proficiency Level	Oral	Reading	Writing	Overall
Beginning	0	2	1	1
Early Intermediate	3	2	1	2
Intermediate	3	1	3	2
Early Advanced	1	0	1	1
Advanced	0	1	0	0
Not Applicable	0	1	1	1
TOTAL	7	7	7	7

High School. The grade level, years enrolled in the district, disability category, and retention status for each high school student is presented in Table 5. The students at the high school were enrolled in 9th (n = 5), 10th (n = 2), and 12th (n = 1) grades. Three of the 7 students had attended schools outside of the district prior to 2002–2003 school year. One student attended a school in another state for 7th grade, but school attendance for 6th and 8th grade was not documented. Another student had no educational records prior to 4th grade when enrolled in the district. The final student attended seven different elementary and middle schools in the U.S. before enrolling in the district mid-way through the 10th grade.

All of the English language learners at the high school had specific learning disabilities. One student was retained in two different grades. One student received resource specialist services while the remaining students participated in a special day class that was a segregated program

within the high school. Two of those students also received vocational education training and speech and language therapy. Five of the 8 students were reported as having some behavioral concerns.

Table 5. School Information for High School Students

Student	Grade Level	Years in District	Disability	Retention
H1	9	11	SLD	Unknown
H2	9	13	SLD	3rd and 5th
H3	9	11	SLD	No
H4	9	12	SLD	No
H5	9	11	SLD	No
H6	10	1	SLD	Unknown
H7	10	9	SLD	No
H8	12	11	SLD	No

The number of high school students in each proficiency level derived from the results of the state-developed English proficiency test is presented in Table 6. One student was administered the KCPL test in lieu of the state English proficiency test due to the severity of the student’s disability. This student’s score is included in the overall category only. High school students’ oral proficiency levels were mostly at the intermediate level. Reading proficiency levels ranged from beginning to intermediate with writing skills predominately at the early intermediate level. The overall level also fell predominately at the early intermediate level.

Table 6. Number of High School Students in English Proficiency Test Score Categories

Proficiency Level	Test Content Areas			
	Oral	Reading	Writing	Overall
Beginning	0	2	1	0
Early Intermediate	1	1	4	4
Intermediate	5	2	0	2
Early Advanced	0	0	0	0
Advanced	0	0	0	0
Not Applicable	0	1	1	1
TOTAL	6	6	6	7

Written Survey

The written survey data were compiled across all schools involved in this district case study. A total of 77 (n = 77) teachers and administrators completed the survey. The 21 survey items were organized into four categories: (1) participation-related data elements; (2) performance-related data elements; (3) student and parent-related data elements; and (4) teachers-related data ele-

ments. Each category is presented separately with the frequencies and percentages of responses reported for each item in a tabular format. Survey items included the proper name of the state tests and district terminology for describing English language learners with disabilities, but to preserve the anonymity of the district, large-scale assessments were referred to as “state test” with any references to the district eliminated in this report. Also, the term “blank” indicated “no response” to that survey item.

In reporting on the survey findings, the results are organized by the data analysis approach. First, we present all of the results from the closed items for all school levels and sample subgroups. This allows us to understand opinions and perceptions across schools. Next, our findings are organized according to the sample subgroup analyses of school levels and educator role to look at results at a more detailed level. In turn, the sample subgroup analysis informs the interpretation of the aggregated results by pointing to similarities and differences within the data set as a composite whole.

Participation-Related Data Elements. “Usually” was the most frequently selected response to all but three of the nine items in this category of items. On three items, “rarely” was selected most frequently for English language learners with disabilities use only second language accommodations to take the state tests (item 4), English language learners with disabilities complete about half of the state test items (item 7), and English language learners with disabilities complete ten or less state test items (item 8). The results from participation-related survey items are presented in Figure 1. (see Appendix B for Table B1 of participation-related item results with complete survey item content).






The majority of respondents indicated that English language learners with disabilities “always” (42%) or “usually” (52%) take the state tests (item 1), and “always” (30%) or “usually” (55%) use some form of accommodations (item 2). Approximately 15% of the respondents reported that these students “rarely” use accommodations. Two participants did not respond to these survey items. These accommodations are more likely to be designed for special education than for English language learners; 69% of the respondents indicated that these students “usually” or “always” use only special education accommodations to take the state tests (item 3), and 58% indicated that these students “rarely” or “never” use only second language accommodations to take the state tests (item 4). Combining these two types of accommodations groups may be more popular, in that 21% and 47% of the respondents reported that these students “always” and “usually” use both accommodations for English language and disability-related reasons (item 5), while 18% and 10% indicated that this “rarely” or “never” occurs. Only 3 participants failed to respond to this item.

Most English language learners with disabilities typically complete all the items on the state tests with 29% and 47% responding that this “always” or “usually” occurs, respectively, and 20% indicated that this “rarely” occurs (item 6). Four participants did not respond to this item. Some respondents indicated that English language learners with disabilities only partially completed the state tests; 43% reported that these students “usually” or “always” complete no more than half of the state test items (item 7), and 30% reported that these students “usually” or “always” complete ten or less state test items (item 8), with seven and ten respondents failing to answer these two items respectively.





In terms of alternate assessment participation, nearly 40% of respondents indicated that English language learners with disabilities “usually” participated in this large-scale assessment while almost 15% and 24% thought their participation was “always” or “rarely,” respectively (item 9). Yet, nearly 18% of the educators who responded to this survey item thought that these students “never” took an alternate assessment. Only five respondents did not answer this survey item.

Figure 1. Participation-Related Survey Results by Item

1) English language learners with disabilities take the state test.

Never		1.3%	(n = 1)
Rarely		2.6%	(n = 2)
Usually		51.9%	(n = 40)
Always		41.6%	(n = 32)
Blank		2.6%	(n = 2)

2) English language learners with disabilities use accommodations to take the state test.

Never		0.0%	
Rarely		14.3%	(n = 11)
Usually		54.5%	(n = 42)
Always		29.9%	(n = 23)
Blank		2.6%	(n = 2)

3) English language learners with disabilities use only special education accommodations to take the state test.

Never		3.9%	(n = 3)
Rarely		23.4%	(n = 18)
Usually		55.8%	(n = 43)
Always		13.0%	(n = 10)
Blank		3.9%	(n = 3)

4) English language learners with disabilities use only second language accommodations to take the state test.

Never		11.7% (n = 9)
Rarely		45.5% (n = 35)
Usually		28.6% (n = 22)
Always		9.1% (n = 7)
Blank		5.2% (n = 4)

5) English language learners with disabilities use both special education and second language accommodations to take the state test.

Never		10.4% (n = 8)
Rarely		18.2% (n = 14)
Usually		46.8% (n = 36)
Always		20.8% (n = 16)
Blank		3.9% (n = 3)

6) English language learners with disabilities complete all state test items.

Never		0.0%
Rarely		19.5% (n = 15)
Usually		46.8% (n = 36)
Always		28.6% (n = 22)
Blank		5.2% (n = 4)

7) English language learners with disabilities complete about half of the state test items.

Never		13.0% (n = 10)
Rarely		35.1% (n = 27)
Usually		29.9% (n = 23)
Always		13.0% (n = 10)
Blank		9.1% (n = 7)

8) English language learners with disabilities complete ten or less state test items.

Never		23.4% (n = 18)
Rarely		33.8% (n = 26)
Usually		18.2% (n = 14)
Always		11.7% (n = 9)
Blank		13.0% (n = 10)

9) Most of the English language learners with disabilities in my school participate in an alternate assessment to the state test.

Never		18.2% (n = 14)
Rarely		23.4% (n = 18)
Usually		37.7% (n = 29)
Always		14.3% (n = 11)
Blank		6.5% (n = 5)

Performance-Related Data Elements. On the five items in this category, “Usually” was again the most frequently selected response. This was the case for all except two items where “Rarely” was selected most frequently for English language learners with disabilities are proficient on the state tests (item 12) and English language learners with disabilities do pass high stakes tests (item 14). The results for the performance-related survey items are presented in Figure 2 (see Appendix B, Table B2 for performance-related item results with complete survey items content).

Nearly 20% of the educators who responded to this survey reported that English language learners with disabilities are “always” able to demonstrate their knowledge and their abilities on the state tests, and only 3% responded that this “never” happens (item 10). Approximately 48% and 27% responded that English language learners with disabilities are “usually” or “rarely” able to do so, respectively, and 2 respondents failed to answer this item. Similarly, 20% of respondents reported that English language learners with disabilities are “always” able to achieve a level of proficiency on the state test (item 11), with 40%, 31%, and 7% responding “usually,” “rarely,” or “never” to this item, respectively. Two participants did not respond to this item. This is in contrast to only 10% of the respondents who reported that these students “always” are proficient on the state tests (item 12). More responded that these students are “usually” or “rarely” proficient, with a 23% and 53% response to item 12, respectively. Also, 8% of the respondents indicated that these students are “never” proficient on the state tests; four participants did not respond to item 12.






Most of the respondents (42%) reported that these students “usually” can pass high stakes tests (item 13), 34% reported that this “rarely” occurs, 13% reported that this “always” occurs, and 7% reported that this “never” occurs; four respondents did not answer item 13. In contrast, most of the respondents (46%) reported that these students “rarely” do pass high stakes tests (item 14), followed by a 30% response that this “usually” occurs, and 8% for both responses that this “always” or “never” occurs; seven respondents did not answer item 14.

Figure 2. Performance-Related Survey Results by Item






10) English language learners with disabilities can demonstrate what they know and can do on the state test.








11) English language learners with disabilities can be Proficient on the state test.

Never		6.5% (n = 5)
Rarely		31.2% (n = 24)
Usually		40.3% (n = 31)
Always		19.5% (n = 15)
Blank		2.6% (n = 2)






12) English language learners with disabilities are proficient on the state test.

Never		7.8% (n = 6)
Rarely		53.2% (n = 41)
Usually		23.4% (n = 18)
Always		10.4% (n = 8)
Blank		5.2% (n = 4)

13) English language learners with disabilities can pass high stakes tests.

Never		6.5% (n = 5)
Rarely		33.8% (n = 26)
Usually		41.6% (n = 32)
Always		13.0% (n = 10)
Blank		5.2% (n = 4)

14) English language learners with disabilities do pass high stakes tests.

Never		7.8% (n = 6)
Rarely		45.5% (n = 35)
Usually		29.9% (n = 23)
Always		7.8% (n = 6)
Blank		9.1% (n = 7)

Student- and Parent-Related Data Elements. Overall, “usually” was the most frequently selected response for all four student and parent related items garnering nearly 70% or more responses for each item. The results for the student and parent-related survey items are presented in Figure 3 (see Appendix B, Table B3 for performance-related item results with complete survey items content).

Respondents reported that parents of English language learners with disabilities “usually” understand what the state tests are (69%); 20% reported “rarely,” 7% reported “always,” and 4% reported that these parents “never” understand the concept of state tests (item 15). Only one participant failed to respond to this item. Similarly, 75% of the respondents reported that these parents “usually” understand what test accommodations are; 14% reported “always,” 8% reported “rarely,” and 3% reported that these parents “never” comprehend the meaning of test accommodations (item 16). All respondents answered this item.

Respondents indicated that these students “usually” understand what state tests are (68%), and that 17% reported that they “rarely” understand, 13% reported that they “always” understand, and 1% reported that they “never” understand what the state tests are (item 17). Only one respondent did not answer this item. Again, a majority of respondents indicated that these students “usually” understand what test accommodations are (69%), and that both the “always” and “rarely” answers received a 14% response (item 18). No respondents indicated that these students “never” understand what test accommodations are, and two respondents did not answer this item.

Figure 3. Student- and Parent-Related Survey Results by Item

15) English language learners with disabilities’ parents understand what the state tests are.



16) English language learners with disabilities’ parents understand what test accommodations are.



17) English language learners with disabilities understand what the state tests are.



18) English language learners with disabilities understand what test accommodations are.



Teacher-Related Data Elements. Three survey items pertained to either teachers themselves or to teachers as member of IEP teams. The results for these items are presented in Figure 4. For 19, a little more than 85% of the respondents indicated that someone with second language

expertise “usually” or “always” attended IEP team meetings for English language learners. Only 13% responded that this “rarely” happened and approximately 1% of the participants left the item blank. Regarding the members of IEP teams for English language learners with disabilities who selected test accommodations for statewide testing (item 20), almost 60% of 167 responses thought special education teachers made the selection with almost 56% indicating that general education teachers made the selection. Less respondents thought that second language teachers and parents selected state test accommodations. Nearly 28% of the respondents thought second language teachers made the selection and another 28% thought that parents did. Almost 15% of 167 responses indicated that the student made the test accommodations selection with nearly 30% responding that “other” individuals did so. Approximately 5% indicated “don’t know” who selected test accommodations for English language learners with disabilities. Item 21 requested who knew the family background for English language learners and about 66% thought that general education teachers and nearly 63% special education teachers knew this information. Second language teachers at approximately 35% and parents at nearly 25% thought that the student knew, with a little more than 14% indicating that the information was known by “others” and approximately 14% did not know.

Figure 4. Teacher-Related Survey Results by Item








19) There is someone with second language expertise on English language learners with disabilities’ IEP teams in my school.

Never		0.0%
Rarely		13.0% (n = 10)
Usually		51.9% (n = 40)
Always		33.8% (n = 26)
Blank		1.3% (n = 1)

20) People who select test accommodations for English language learners with disabilities’ use in state testing.

	Out of a total 167 responses:	Count	Percent
a. Special education teacher(s)		46	59.7%
b. Second language teacher(s)		21	27.3%
c. General education teacher(s)		43	55.8%
d. Parent(s)		21	27.3%
e. SPELL		11	14.3%
f. Other		21	27.3%
g. Don’t know		4	5.2%

21) People who know English language learners with disabilities' family background.

Out of a total 185 responses:		Count	Percent
a. Special education teacher		48	62.3%
b. Second language teacher		27	35.1%
c. General education teacher		51	66.2%
d. Parent(s)		27	35.1%
e. Student		19	24.7%
f. Other		11	14.3%
g. Don't know		2	2.6%

Written Survey: Between School Results

To gain a different perspective on the data, results are reported in this section on a school by school basis. The same group categories are used here as in the previous section. A total of 20 elementary school educators (n = 20), 36 middle school educators (n = 36), and 21 secondary school educators (n = 21) completed the survey. The elementary school educators primarily had experience teaching general education (70%), followed by English as a second language (ESL; 25%), and special education (20%; Figure 5). These educators had an average of seven years as an educator, with a minimum of two years teaching, and a maximum of 15 years teaching (Figure 6). The middle school educators primarily had experience teaching general education (86%), followed by special education (19%), ESL (6%), and other (3%; Figure 7). These educators had an average of eight years as an educator, with a minimum of two years in the profession, and a maximum of 29 years in the profession (Figure 8). The secondary school educators primarily had experience teaching special education (91%), followed by general education (43%), ESL (14%), and other (2%; Figure 9). These educators had an approximate average of 10 years teaching, with a minimum of two years as an educator, and a maximum of 28 years as an educator (Figure 10).

Figure 5. Elementary School Professional Roles

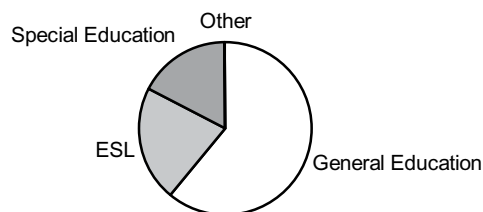


Figure 6. Elementary School Years As a Teacher

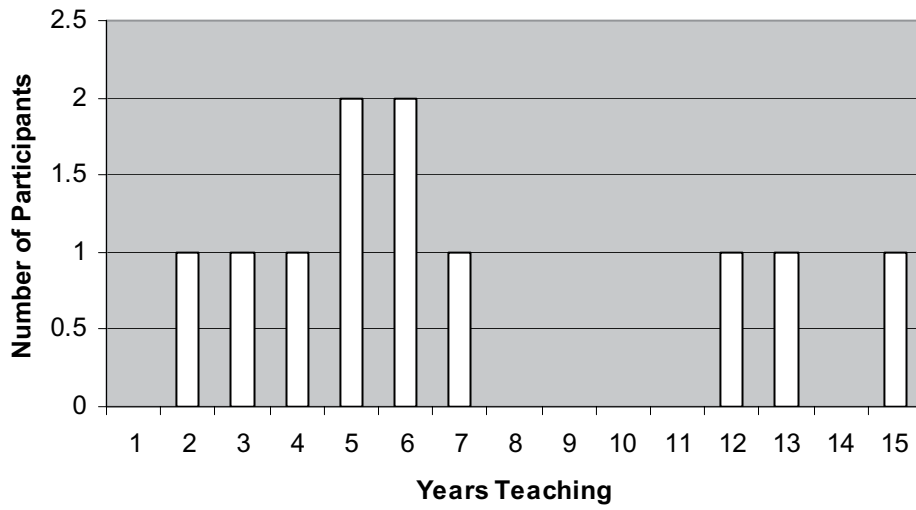


Figure 7. Middle School Professional Roles

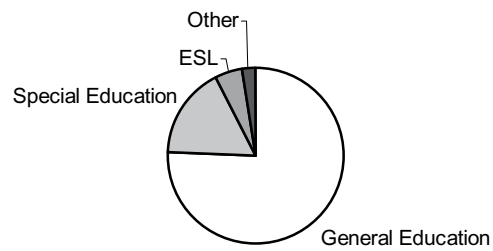


Figure 8. Middle School Years As a Teacher

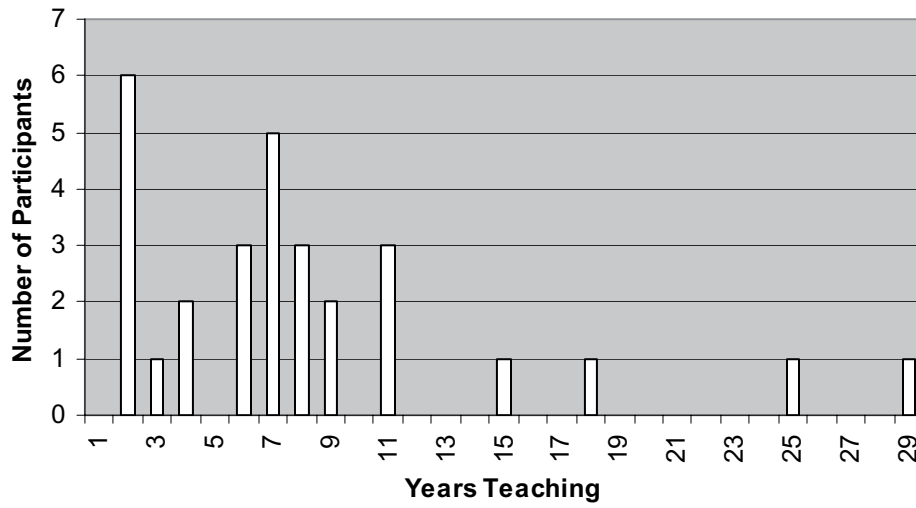


Figure 9. Secondary School Professional Roles

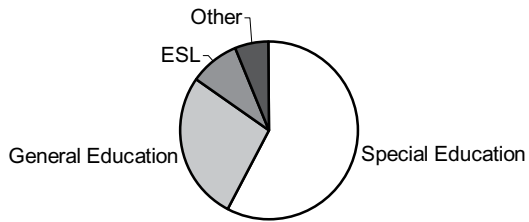
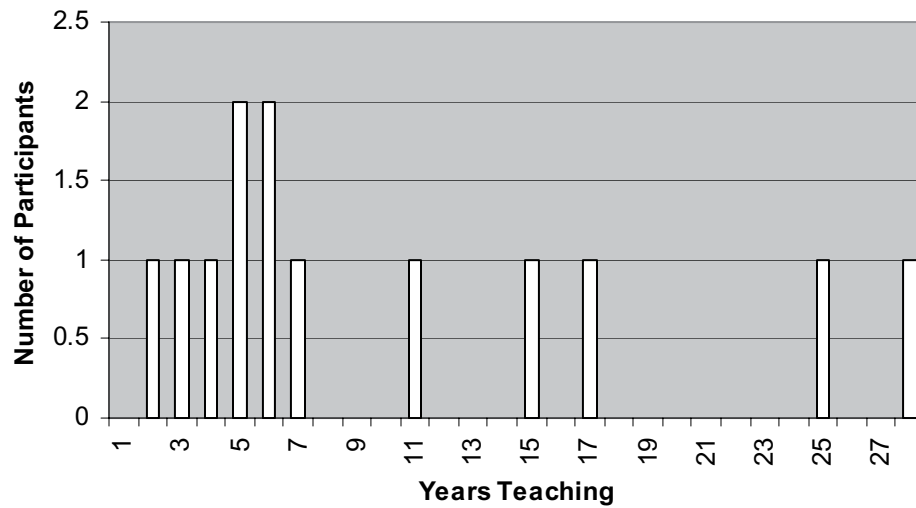


Figure 10. Secondary School Years as a Teacher



Participation-Related Data Elements. All of the elementary school participants indicated that English language learners with disabilities “usually” or “always” take the state test, with slightly lower numbers for the middle school (92%) and the secondary schools (81%; Figure 11). Alternate assessment participation was less clear. There was no pattern reported in the elementary school, and there were differences between the middle and the secondary schools. The majority of middle school participants indicated that most of these students “usually” or “always” (70%) take an alternate assessment, while the majority of the secondary school participants indicated that most of these students “rarely” or “never” (62%) take an alternate assessment (Figure 12).

English language learners with disabilities “usually” or “always” use accommodations when taking the state test at the elementary (100%), middle (75%), and the secondary school (86%) levels (Figure 13). However, the type of accommodations used varies by school. The majority of elementary (80%), middle (64%), and secondary (62%) school participants indicated that these students “usually” or “always” use *both* special education and second language accommodations (Figure 14). Similarly, when English language learners with disabilities use one type of accommodations, elementary (50%), middle (72%), and secondary (81%) respondents indicated that they use *only* special education accommodations (Figure 15). In contrast, while the elementary (80%) and secondary (62%) school participants responded that these students “rarely” or “never” use *only* second language accommodations, 59% of the middle school participants responded that these students “usually” or “always” use *only* second language accommodations (Figure 16).

In terms of completing the state test, there is a general pattern of full completion. At the elementary school level, participants responded that English language learners with disabilities “usually” or “always” complete *all* of the state test items (55%; Figure 17). Only 20% indicated that these students “usually” or “always” complete about *half* of the state test items (Figure 18), and 5% indicated that these students “usually” or “always” complete *ten or less* state test items (Figure 19). Responses from the secondary school educators followed a similar pattern, decreasing from 76% to 43% to 10%, respectively. There was also a decrease in the middle school educators’ responses; 86% reported that these students “usually” or “always” complete *all* the items (Figure 17) and 56% reported that they “usually” or “always” complete about *half* the items (Figure 18), but 55% also reported that these students “usually” or “always” complete *ten or less* items (Figure 19).

Figure 11. State Test Participation

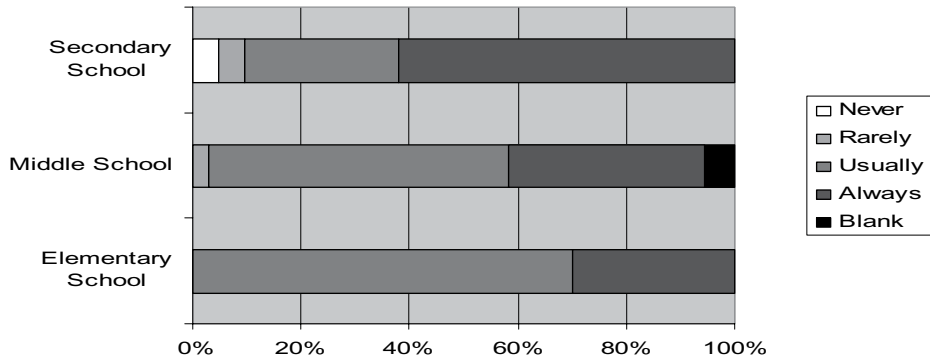


Figure 12. Alternate Assessment Participation

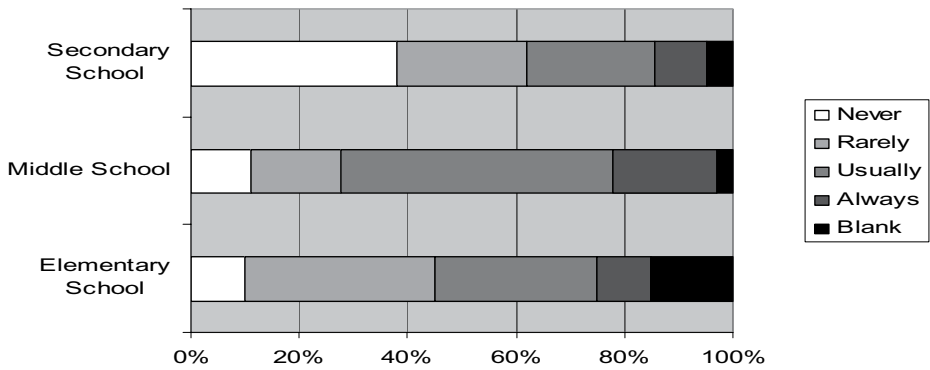


Figure 13. Accommodations Use of State Test

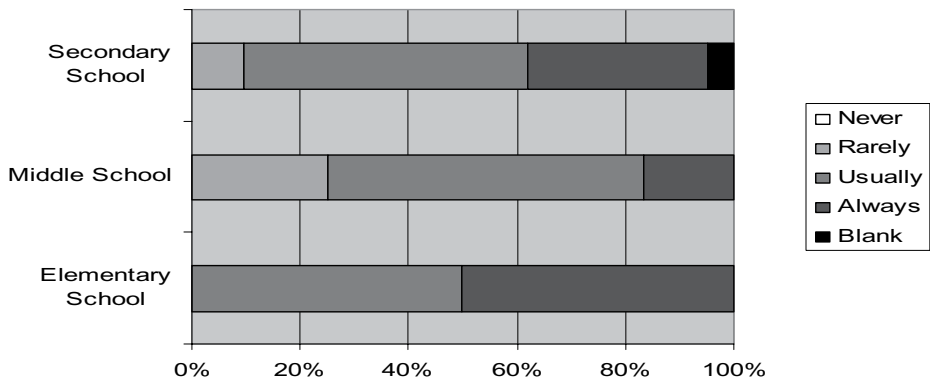


Figure 14. Both Special Education and Second Language Accommodations Use

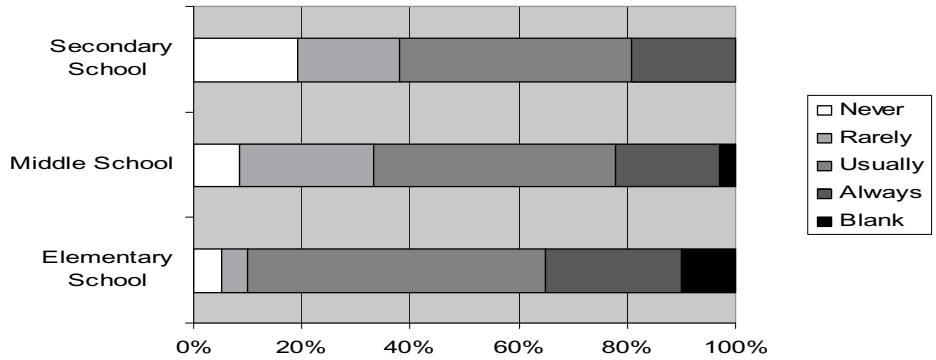


Figure 15. Only Special Education Accommodations Use

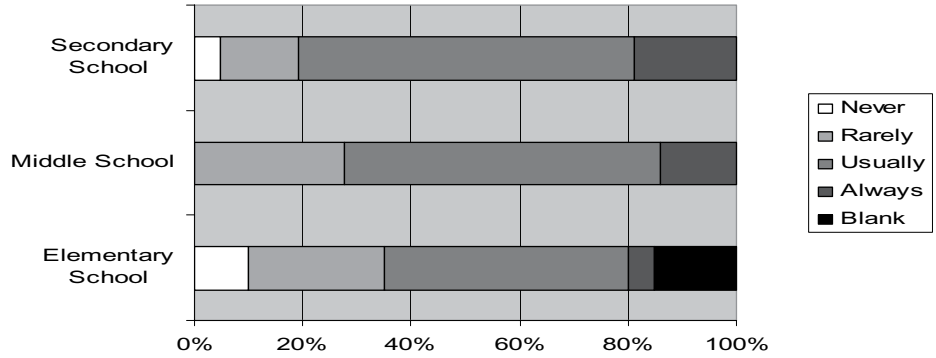


Figure 16. Only Second Language Accommodations Use

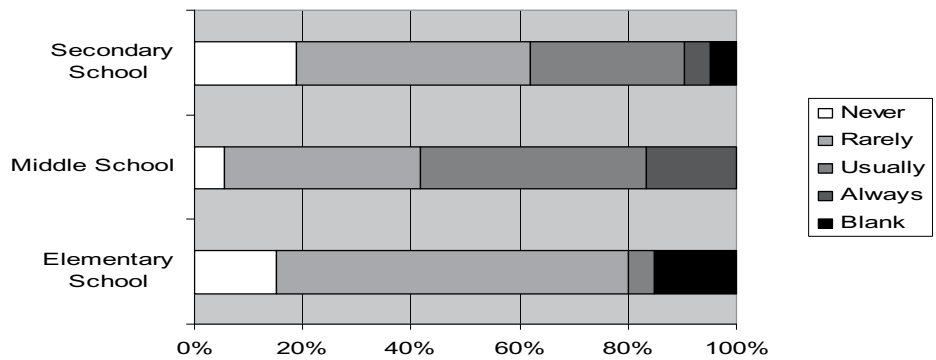


Figure 17. Complete All State Test Items

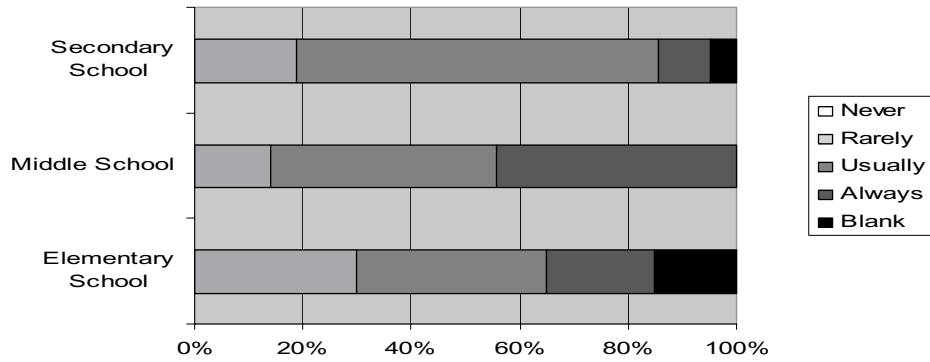


Figure 18. Complete About Half of All State Test Items

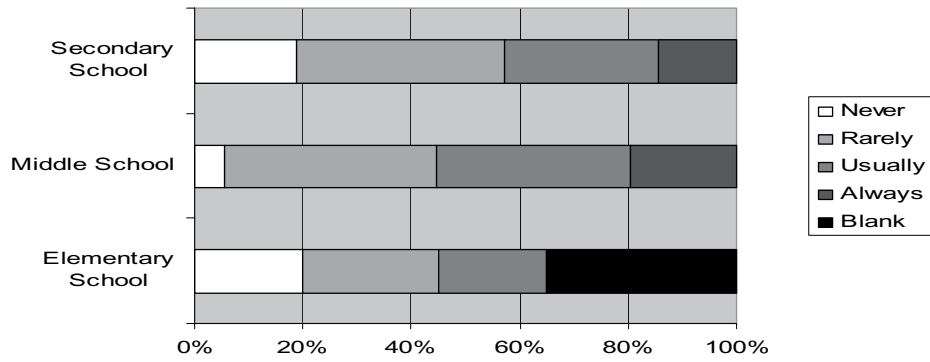
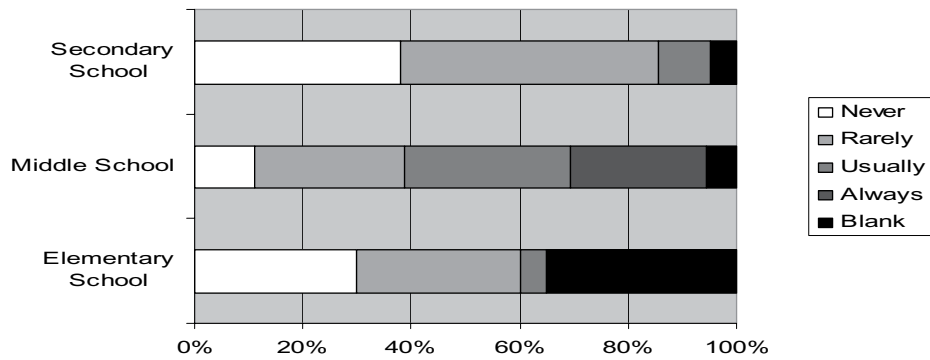


Figure 19. Complete Ten or Less of All State Test Items



Performance-Related Data Elements. The majority of middle school participants (95%) believed that English language learners with disabilities “usually” or “always” can demonstrate what they know and can do on the state tests. Elementary (50%) and secondary (38%) school participants did not respond in the same manner. In fact, 52% of secondary school participants responded that these students “rarely” can demonstrate their knowledge and abilities on the state tests (Figure 20). The middle school educators largely (81%) believed that these students “usually” or “always” can be proficient on the state tests, echoed by a slightly lower response (61%) that these students are proficient on the state tests. The elementary and secondary school participants again took a different view. While the elementary participants split their opinion that these students can be proficient, with 45% responding that this is “never” or “rarely” true, and 45% responding that this is “usually” or “always” true, 75% of these educators reported that these students “never” or “rarely” are proficient on the state tests. The majority of the secondary school participants reported that these students “never” or “rarely” can be (62%) or are (91%) proficient on the state tests (Figure 21). A similar pattern emerged when respondents were asked if English language learners with disabilities can and do pass high stakes tests. Middle school participants responded that these students “usually” or “always” can (81%) and do (58%) pass high stakes tests. Approximately 50% of the elementary school educators and 71% of the secondary school educators reported that these students “never” or “rarely” can pass high stakes tests, with response rates rising to 65% and 81%, respectively, when asked if these students do pass high stakes tests (Figure 22).

Figure 20. Demonstration of Knowledge and Abilities on State Test

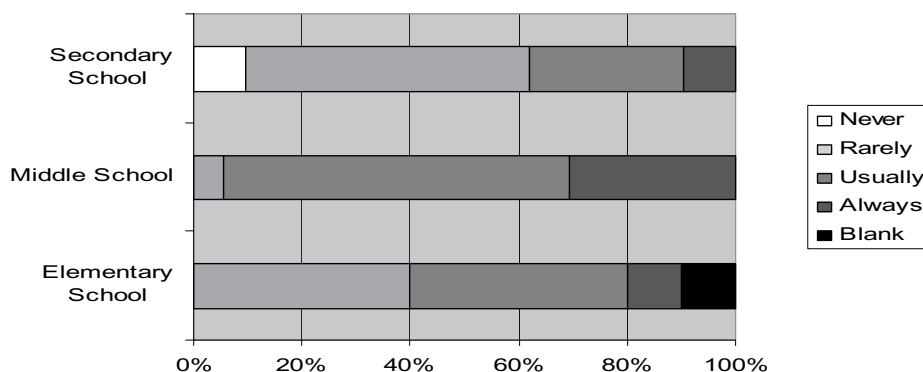


Figure 21. Proficiency on the State Test

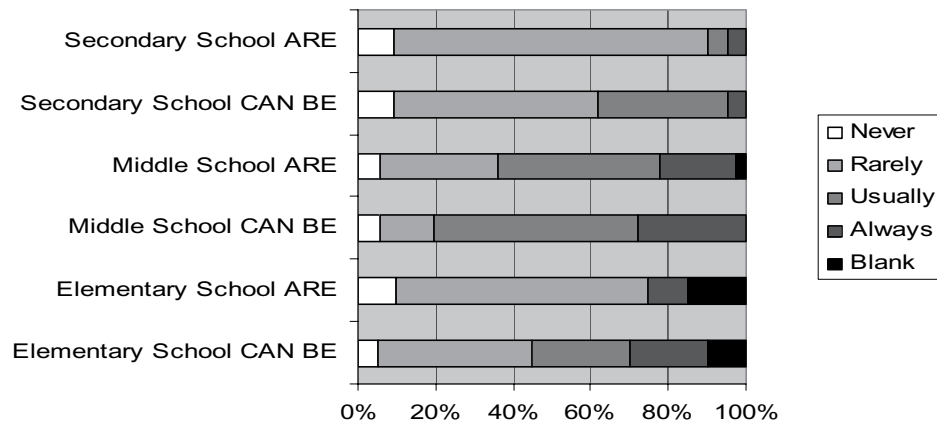
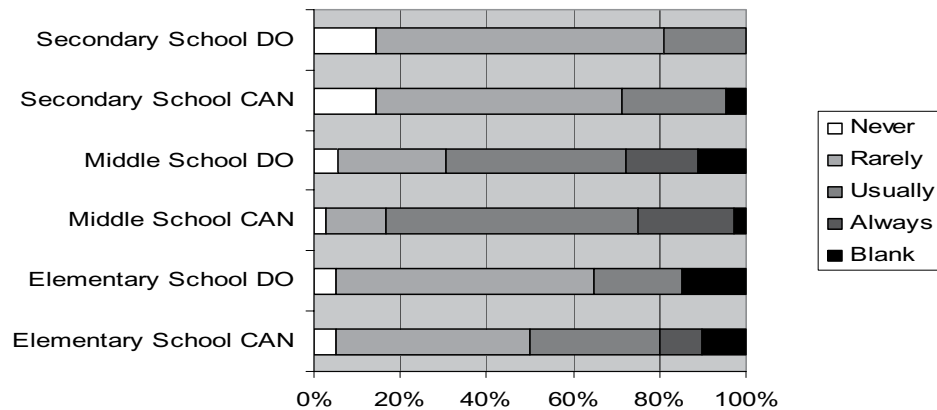


Figure 22. Passing the State Test



Parent and Student-Related Data Elements. In general, elementary (70%), middle (78%), and secondary (52%) school educators believed that parents of English language learners with disabilities “usually” understand the purpose of the state tests. Similarly, elementary (70%), middle (81%), and secondary (71%) school participants believed that these parents “usually” understand test accommodations. The same pattern emerged when asked about students’ understanding of the state tests and test accommodations. Approximately 65% of elementary, 67% of middle, and 71% of secondary school respondents believed that English language learners with disabilities “usually” understand what the state tests are, and 55%, 72%, and 76%, respectively, indicated that these students “usually” understand what test accommodations are.

Teacher-Related Data Elements. When asked if someone with second language expertise is on the IEP teams of English language learners with disabilities, the most frequent response at all grade levels was “usually,” with 55% of the elementary, 55% of the middle, and 43% of the secondary school educators responding in this manner. “Always” was the second most frequent response, with 30%, 39%, and 29% selecting this response at the elementary, middle, and secondary school level, respectively. The elementary school educators responded that the special education teachers (55%) typically decide on the test accommodations these students will use to take the state tests while the middle school educators reported that the general education teachers (81%) complete this task. The secondary school educators selected, by majority response, four individuals who decide on test accommodations for English language learners with disabilities: special education teachers (95%), parents (67%), second language teachers (62%), and other (52%). Finally, respondents were asked to select which individuals know the most about these students’ family backgrounds. The elementary school participants reported that the special education teachers (70%) and general education teachers (55%) know this information while 86% of the middle school participants responded that general education teachers know these students’ family backgrounds the most. Again, the secondary school educators selected, by majority response, four groups of individuals who they generally believed knew this information well: special education teachers (91%), second language teachers (67%), parents (67%), and students (57%).

Written Survey: Between Professional Roles Results

In a third and final perspective on the data, results are reported in this section based on the participants’ professional role: special education teachers (n = 30), general education teachers (n = 54), second language teachers (n = 10), and other (n = 3). Due to the small number of participants classified as other, this group was not included in these analyses. The special education teachers had an average of 10 years as an educator, with a minimum of two years and a maximum of 28 years (Figure 23). The general education teachers had an average of eight years in the profession, with a minimum of two years and a maximum of 29 years (Figure 24). The second language teachers had an average of 14 years as an educator, with a minimum of five years and a maximum of 29 years (Figure 25).

Figure 23. Special Education Teachers' Years as a Teacher

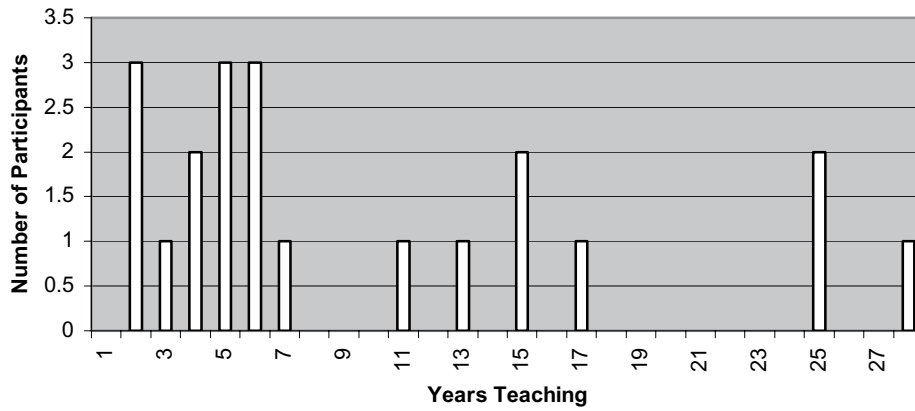


Figure 24. General Education Teachers' Years as a Teacher

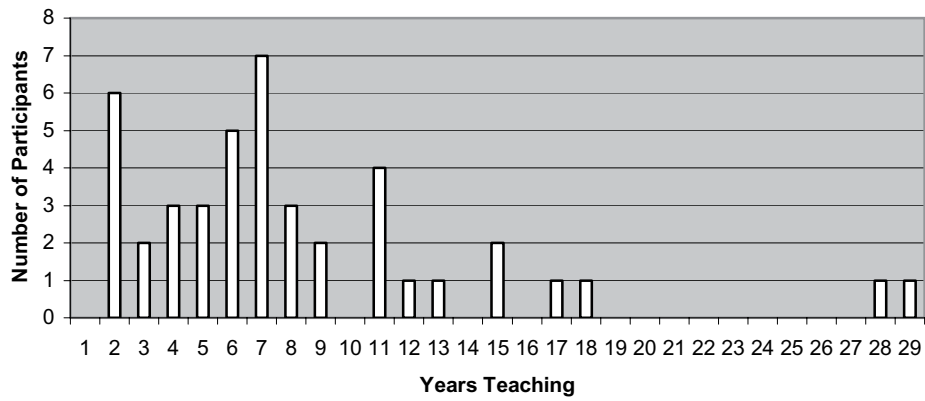
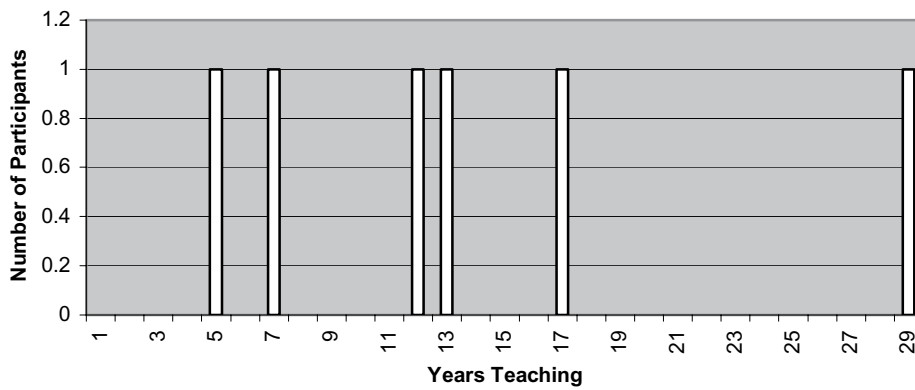


Figure 25. Second Language Teachers' Years as a Teacher



Participation-Related Data Elements. All of the second language teachers, 95% of the general education teachers, and 93% of the special education teachers indicated that English language learners with disabilities “usually” or “always” take the state test (Figure 26). However, the respondents were unanimously split when asked about alternate assessment participation. While a simple majority of special education teachers (53%) responded that these students “rarely” or “never” participate in an alternate assessment to the state test, both second language teachers (50%) and general education teachers (56%) responded that these students “usually” or “always” participate in an alternate assessment (Figure 27).

In terms of accommodations use, 83% of special education teachers, 87% of general education teachers, and 90% of second language teachers indicated that English language learners with disabilities use accommodations to take the state tests (Figure 28). Special education teachers (57%), second language teachers (60%), and general education teachers (70%) generally responded that these students “usually” or “always” use *both* special education and second language accommodations to take the state tests (Figure 29). Those students who use only one type of accommodations “usually” or “always” use *only* special education accommodations according to second language (70%), general education (72%), and special education (73%) teachers (Figure 30). This finding is coupled with a majority response of “rarely” or “never” from general education (56%), special education (63%), and second language (70%) teachers when asked if these students use *only* second language accommodations (Figure 31).

Seventy-seven percent of special education and 78% of general education teachers responded that English language learners with disabilities “usually” or “always” complete all of the state test items (Figure 32). Half of the second language teachers responded in this manner (50%). The “usually” or “always” response rate dropped to 43% and 48% of special education and general education teachers, respectively, when asked if these students complete about half of the state test items; however, this rate did not decrease for second language teachers (50%; Figure 33). Generally, special education (73%), second language (60%), and general education (48%) teachers reported that these students “never” or “rarely” complete ten or less state test items (Figure 34).

Figure 26. State Test Participation

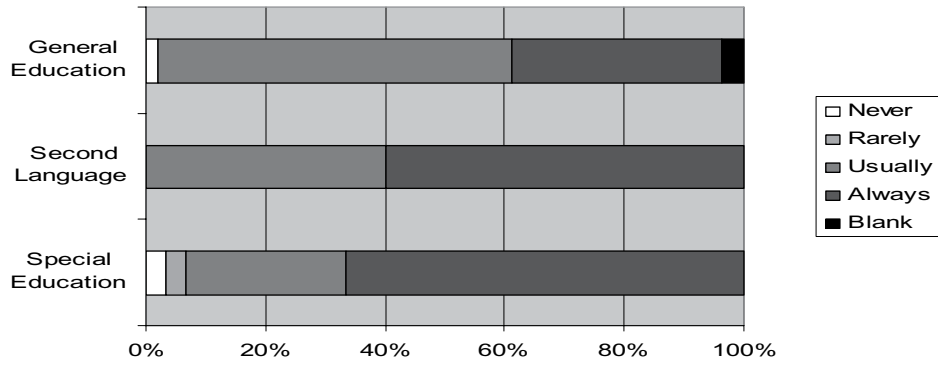


Figure 27. Alternate Assessment Participation

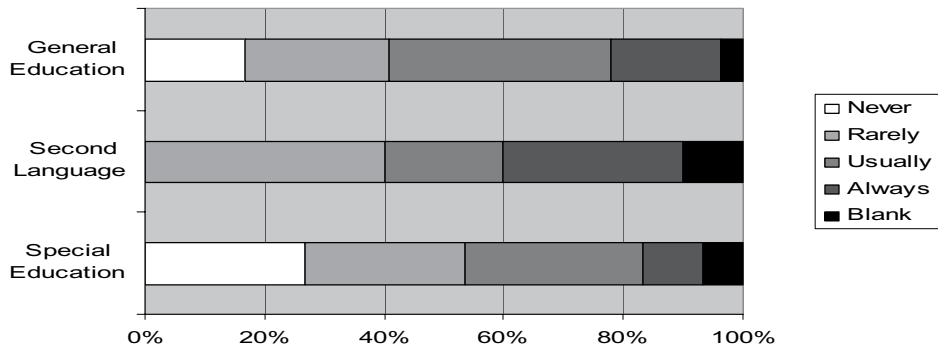


Figure 28. Accommodations Use of State Test

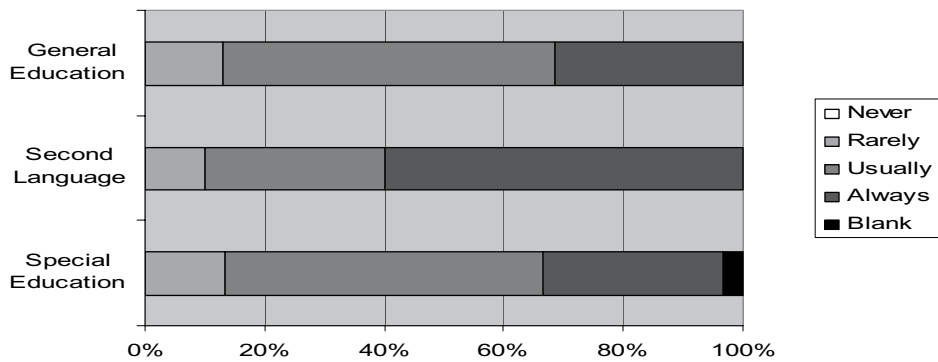


Figure 29. Both Special Education and Second Language Accommodations Use

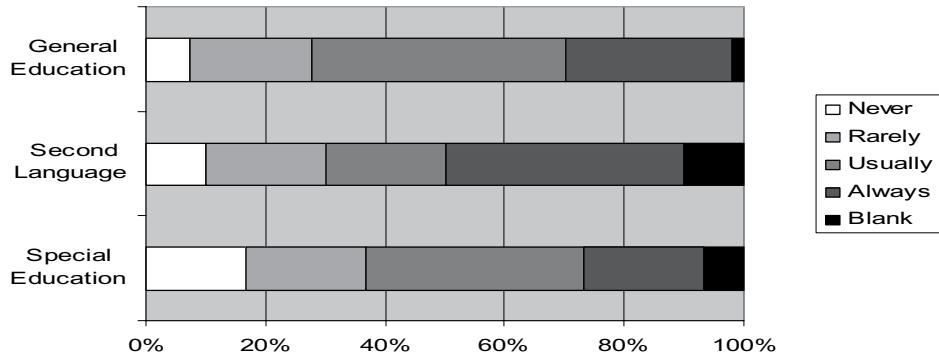


Figure 30. Only Special Education Accommodations Use

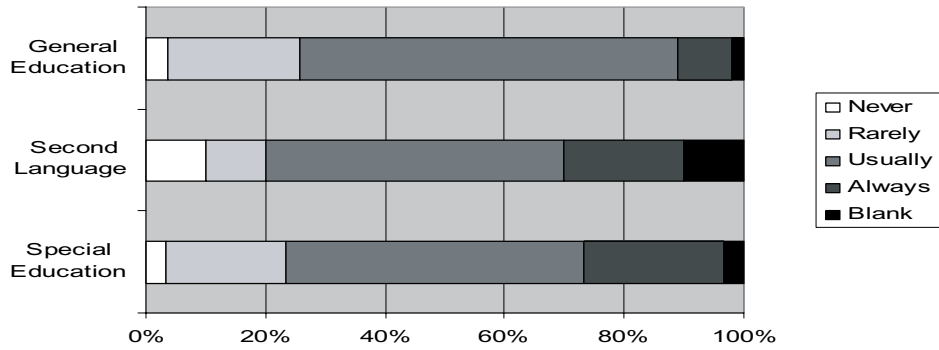


Figure 31. Only Second Language Accommodations Use

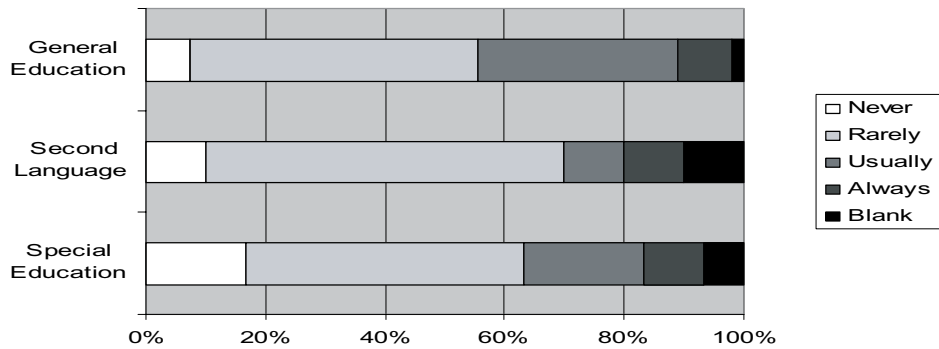


Figure 32. Complete All State Test Items

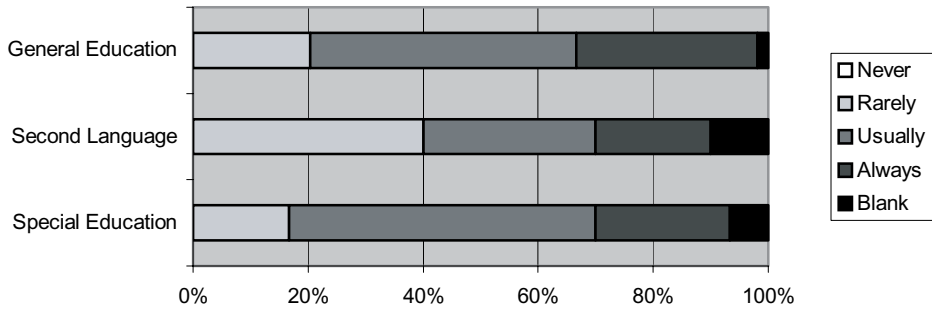


Figure 33. Complete About Half of All State Test Items

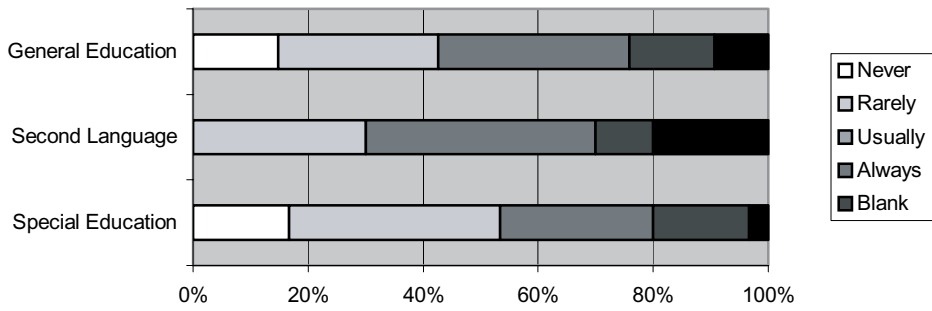
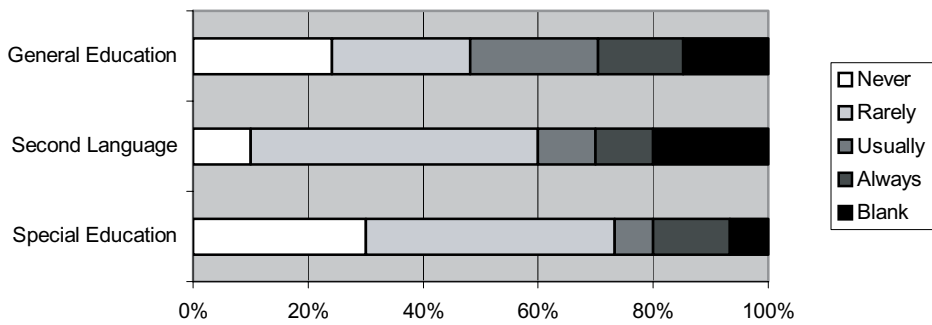


Figure 34. Complete Ten or Less of All State Test Items



Performance-Related Data Elements. While the majority of general education teachers (74%) responded that English language learners with disabilities “usually” or “always” can demonstrate what they know and can do on the state tests, special education and second language teachers were less certain of this. Approximately 50% of the special education teachers indicated that these students “usually” or “always” can demonstrate their knowledge and abilities on the state tests, while 50% of second language teachers indicated that these students “rarely” or “never” can demonstrate their knowledge and abilities on the state tests (Figure 35). Although general education teachers (69%) reported that these students “usually” or “always” *can be* proficient on the state tests, special education (57%) and second language (60%) teachers reported that these students “rarely” or “never” *can be* proficient on the state tests (Figure 36). Special education (76%), second language (70%), and general education (57%) teachers agreed that these students “rarely” or “never” *are* proficient on the state tests (Figure 36). Similarly, while general education teachers (63%) indicated that English language learners with disabilities “usually” or “always” *can* pass high stakes tests, special education (57%) and second language (70%) teachers indicated that these students “rarely” or “never” *can* pass high stakes tests (Figure 37). This pattern continued when asked if these students *do* pass high stakes tests. Special education (70%) and second language (60%) responded that these students “rarely” or “never” pass these tests, but general education teachers were split between the “rarely/never” (46%) responses and the “usually/always” (46%) responses (Figure 37).

Figure 35. Demonstration of Knowledge and Abilities on State Test

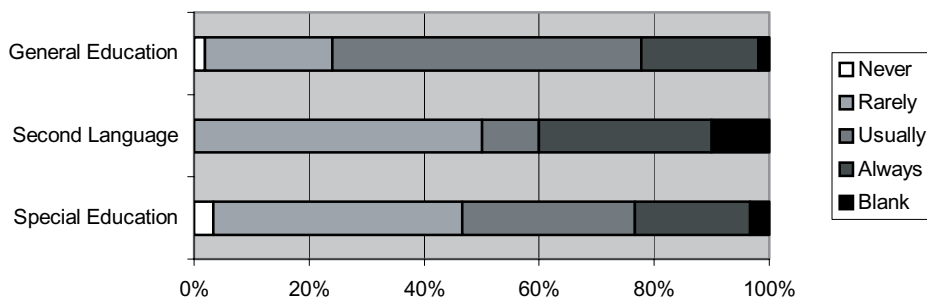


Figure 36. Proficiency on the State Test

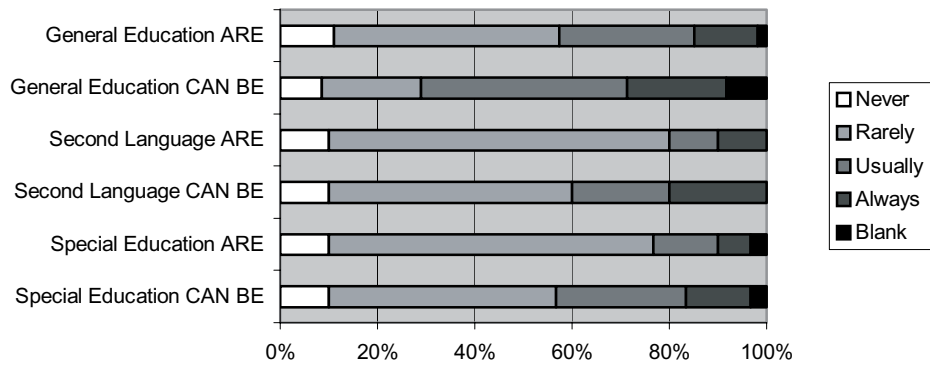
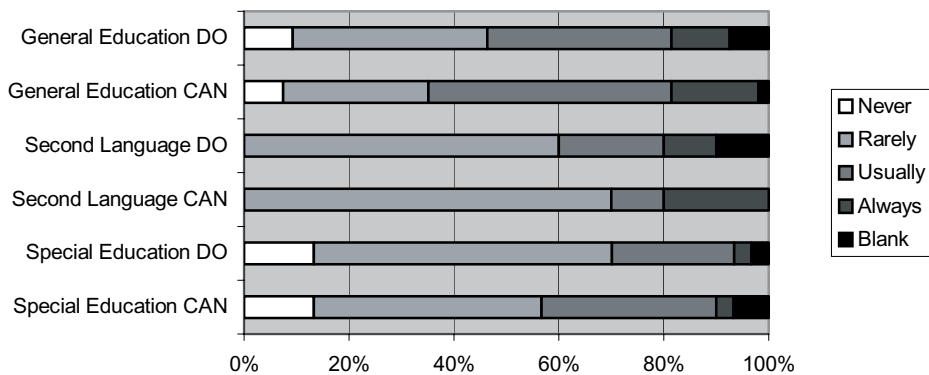


Figure 37. Passing the State Test



Parent and Student-Related Data Elements. “Usually” was the preferred response to each of these items. General education (80%), special education (70%), and second language (70%) teachers reported that parents of English language learners with disabilities “usually” understand what the state tests are, and 93%, 90%, and 80%, respectively, reported that these parents “usually” understand test accommodations. Likewise, general education (85%), special education (83%), and second language (80%) teachers reported that English language learners with disabilities “usually” understand what the state tests are, and 69%, 77%, and 70%, respectively, reported that these students “usually” understand test accommodations.

Teacher-Related Data Elements. The majority of special education (73%), second language (80%), and general education (85%) teachers responded that there is “usually” or “always” someone with second language expertise on IEP teams for English language learners with disabilities. The general education teacher participants indicated that general education (63%) and special education (57%) teachers typically decide on the test accommodations these students will use to take the state tests. Second language teacher participants echoed this response, indicating that special education (90%) and general education (50%) teachers make this decision. Special education teacher participants indicated that four groups of individuals make this decision: special education teachers (90%), general education teachers (57%), second language teachers (53%), and parents (53%). Participants were also asked to indicate which individuals know the most about these students’ family background. General education teacher participants selected general education teachers (80%) and special education teachers (61%) as knowing the most about the family backgrounds. Second language teacher participants selected four groups of individuals: special education teachers (100%), second language teachers (80%), general education teachers (80%), and parents (50%). Special education teacher participants selected the same four groups of individual as did special education teachers: special education teachers (93%), second language teachers (60%), general education teachers (57%), and parents (57%).

Face-to-Face Interviews

The face-to-face interview results are first organized by the sample subgroups of parents of English language learners with disabilities, English language learners, teachers, and administrators. Then, within the sample subgroup sections, we present the findings for the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The findings are thematic, which are summarized and supported by sample quotations from the interviews. Parents’ direct responses are presented in Spanish or English as appropriate. Each parent quote is followed by the direct quotation from the bilingual interpreter who participated in the interviews. Only the English portions of the interpreted interviews are used in the supportive quotations. This organizational format helped us identify deeper understandings of our findings from various subgroup unique perspectives and across and within all school levels.

Parents of English Language Learners with Disabilities in the Elementary School. Twelve themes were identified in the findings from the interviews we conducted with parents from the elementary school. They are summarized here, along with sample quotations from the interviews.

- **Parents perceived teachers at the elementary school as generally available and open to communicating.** This subset of parents typically found their child’s classroom teacher at school to speak informally about any questions or concerns that they had. For the most part, these conversations focused on their child’s behavior or academic progress. Some

parents did call teachers on the telephone, but the telephone was used less frequently to communicate with teachers at school. In response to the bilingual researcher asking whether three parents in the small group interview ever communicated with the school by telephone (“*Hablan con ellos por telefono?*”), all parents responded, “*No.*” Teachers usually tended to call the parents first. Their purposes for calling parents were to make an appointment for a conference at school or to discuss an immediate concern about the child. Parents reported attending conferences at school as the chief means of communicating with teachers, followed by informal conversations before or after school.

P: “*Sí, bueno, cuando yo quiera.*”

I: “Yes, whenever she likes.”

P: “*Pues yo cuando puedo y vengo por la niña a tiempo yo me paso al salón, o sea, le digo a alguien que me interprete lo que le quiero preguntar. Yo tengo juntas con frecuencia.*”

I: “She says that whenever she can, she comes in, and has someone translate for her. And that she has frequent meetings with the teacher.”

P: “*Yo tambien. Cuando ella me llama yo vengo a cita con ella.*”

I: “She says yes, she also has time. Whenever she receives a phone call, she comes to the meetings.”

- **The frequency of communication between parents and teachers varied widely ranging from frequent to infrequent.** Those parents who communicated frequently with their child’s classroom teacher tended to have children with more severe disabilities. In one case, parent-teacher communication occurred daily through the use of a notebook that was sent back and forth between home and school. Otherwise, parents who provided transportation to and from school for their child tended to initiate contact with teachers informally with more frequency and greater ease. At the opposite end of the continuum were those parents who only came to school when requested to do so. This was usually for the annual Individualized Education Program (IEP) team meeting that parents reported rarely missing

P: “*Pues, siempre que necesito hablar nos comunicamos. Diría casi por el libro que me mandan.*”

I: “She said that whenever she needs to she communicates with the teacher, and that now it’s pretty much daily because of a notebook that they send home.”

P: “*Sí, diario lo vengo a dejar y recoger, y siempre le pregunto como se porta cada día y como va cada día.*”

I: “That she brings daily, picks him up daily, and in those exchanges she asks, how he did, how he behaved, so she is aware of what’s going on.”

P: *“Con frecuencia no, pero, si yo necesito hablar con ella yo la busco y yo le hablo.”*

I: “Not frequently she says, but if she needs to talk to her, she will find her and talk to her.”

- **Parents attended conferences most frequently with their child’s special education teachers about their child’s progress in the content areas tested by the statewide assessment.** Each parent reported talking to his or her child’s special education teacher more often than other specialists or general education teachers. By and large, these conversations focused on the child’s progress in math and reading. The exception to this finding is the difference in the content of parent-school communication for those students whose disabilities were severe. For these students, teachers typically relayed information about the child’s daily routines at school such as how they ate lunch or behaved during a specific activity.

P: *“Pues ahorita las, en las conferencias hablo con la, se me olvidan los numbers es la que le ayuda con las matematicas y la lectura.”*

I: “At conference time she speaks mostly to, she forgets the names, the teacher who helps him with math and reading.”

P: *“Este, de todo eso, de como le fue en el día a la niña, si comio o no comio, como se porto y todo el progreso tambien de la niña que esta mejorando.”*

I: “She says she talks to her about everything, including behavior, how she ate that day, and also about the progress she’s making.”

- **Interpreters were always provided for formal communication at pre-determined meetings between parents and teachers.** Parents indicated that there was always someone available to interpret any English spoken at conferences or IEP team meetings. In these settings, parents thought that they understood everything that was said to them although sometimes teachers used specialized educational terms that were not comprehended easily. Some parents participated actively in these instances saying that they asked questions until they understood the information about their child. Parents who participated passively did not understand most of the English conversation. A parent rarely requested a more qualified interpreter because she did not understand the English interpretation. Rather often, parents indicated that they did not think that teachers understood what they said through an interpreter because the conversation generally focused on what the teachers wanted to tell the parents and not on what the parents wanted to tell the teachers.

P: *“Los maestros? Pues, casi la mayoría hablan inglés...siempre hay alguien que me interpreta.”*

I: “She said that the majority of them [teachers] speak English...she also mentioned that there’s always an interpreter available.”

P: *“Sí, algo que no, de mi parte, no entiendo, pues vuelvo a preguntar para que me, para entender lo que me estan diciendo. Como ahorita, ya ve, estabamos hablando...”*

I: “He added that if he doesn’t understand, he’ll go back and ask, and get it clarified. Like now he said, we’re talking.”

P: *“Pues, tiene que ser junto. Los dos, las dos partes...En que yo entienda el programa que ellos tienen.”*

I: “She first said that she thinks that it should be equal, but then, I asked her, well—what do you think that the focus is? And she said that she thinks the focus is on her [parent] understanding them [teachers] and their program.”

- **Parents expressed some concern about the use of bilingual interpreters when conversing with English-speaking teachers.** A few parents indicated that they found communicating with Spanish-speaking teachers much easier than with English-speaking teachers. Some described informal situations where no interpreter was available so that a child was recruited to interpret the conversation. Another parent preferred talking directly to the teacher without having to use another speaker to facilitate the communication. Other parents expressed concerns about the interpreters themselves by explaining the difference between a bilingual interpreter who learned to speak both Spanish and English at a young age compared to English speakers who acquired Spanish skills as adults. Even so, parents thought communication with English-speaking teachers was satisfactory.

P: *“No, porque como la maestra de mi niño habla bien el español...O sea directamente...directamente, nos hablamos. Que hablamos mas con ella, que, casi nunca...tiene ella otra maestra que le ayude. Y el maestro que le ayuda a ella, tambien habla español.”*

I: “They both say that it’s easier because they can speak to them directly versus indirectly, and that the fact that they speak Spanish eases the communication. Also the teacher has an assistant who also speaks Spanish.”

P: *“Pues yo principalmente con el maestro [Spanish teacher’s name], que es el maestro de mi hijo [child’s name]. Con la maestra de mi hija [sibling’s name] pues como, o sea, ella no habla español siempre estamos [untelligible]...y a veces no hay la comunicación pero cuando...”*

I: “He says that typically he speaks to [Spanish teacher’s name] who is the teacher of [child’s name]...and that his daughter’s teacher doesn’t speak Spanish so they’re always [unintelligible] and sometimes the communication isn’t the same but when...”

P: *“No, bueno, algunas veces sí porque muchos hablan inglés pero entienden un pocito español.”*

I: “She said sometimes yes and sometimes no because, because they mostly speak English, but that they do understand a little bit of Spanish.”

P: *“Eso es lo bueno, porque cuando son, que hablan, que aprenden a hablar el español es muy diferente verdad. Pero cuando son...los latinos nos entendemos mejor.”*

I: “She said that it makes a difference when the translator has learned Spanish versus when it’s a Spanish-speaking translator who’s learned English and that as Latinos we understand each other better.”

P: *“Es mejor nacer que aprender porque uno lo sabe de raíz que no para comunicarse. Si uno habla mal usted le sabe decir a ella mas o menos la palabra correcta.”*

I: “She’s saying that it makes a difference being raised, being born and raised speaking it than learning it, because when there’s a slight issue, you know, we can make corrections or use the right word.”

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- **Most formal written communication and some informal written communication from school to home is translated into Spanish.** The parents interviewed for this project indicated understanding written communication more easily because it was written in Spanish. Even hand written notes from teachers were translated by a Spanish literate person. One parent reported that written information from her child’s teacher enhanced communication between her child and herself. According to some parents, IEPs that were translated into Spanish and sent home were understood more easily than the interpreted English at team meetings. Parents reported reading these documents even though written educational “jargon” was just as confusing when written as when spoken.

P: *“A mi tambien. Porque cuando mi niño necesita algo, que esta haciendo algo de tarea o que no llevo la tarea, ella siempre me dice, ‘Tu niño...’ Ellos tienen un papel, verdad, ellos, uno tiene que entrar. Ella dice, ‘Todos los dias en la mañana tu ve y ve si tu niño hizo la tarea o no la hizo. O le faltó hacer una tarea.’ Okay, entonces yo entro y yo veo el sticker que, y ella me esta diciendo que el no hizo la tarea. Entonces yo le tengo que decir, ‘¿Porque no hiciste la tarea?’”*

I: “She says that the communication between her and the teachers, she’s very satisfied because there’s a sheet that gets sent home, so she knows what’s going on in the classroom, whether the homework is done, what assignments are missing, and she can, she can speak to the child and ask him why haven’t you done the work, or tell him here’s what you need to have done.”

P: “Ah-ha, o sea, ella nomas me manda decir, busca a quien mande la nota en español, pero al final ella hace con su letra de ella...”

I: “She says that what she’ll do is she’ll find someone who can write in Spanish and communicate what she needs to say in writing...have them write the note, but then she will sign it.”

- **Parents had heard of the state administered test, but understood its purpose to be one of student accountability.** Parents were familiar with the term “state test,” but indicated that the purpose was to measure students’ academic progress in reading and math. No parent indicated understanding a connection between newspaper reports of schools’ achievement levels and the state test, although many parents had read these newspaper articles. Most parents reported learning about the state test through flyers in Spanish that the school sent home explaining how parents could prepare their children for test day. A few parents were aware of testing because of older siblings in the family, but even fewer of these reported that they remembered discussing the state test at that child’s IEP team meeting.

P: “Pues supongo que para ver si, el progreso, que necesita...Para ver como van...Que es lo que han aprendido...Para ver si han mejorado.” (Several parents’ comments.)

I: “To measure progress, to see what they have learned, if they’ve done better, to see if they need support, and also to see at what level they are at.”

- **Parents of ELLs with severe disabilities were not aware of alternate assessments.** The few parents interviewed whose children participated in an alternate assessment were not aware of this testing process nor of what purpose the assessment served. They also did not understand an alternate assessment to be an element of a state’s standards-based testing and accountability program.

P: “No, no, pues no se [examen alternativo].”

I: “No, she said, she doesn’t know much about it [alternate assessment].”

- **When the terms “IEP” and “accommodation” were described to them, parents knew what they were.** Most parents were aware of what IEPs and accommodations were when these terms were described in basic English words and interpreted to them in Spanish. In other words, parents seemed to understand that an IEP contained their children’s educational goals and an accommodation was to help them learn in a general education

classroom. Yet, only one set of parents recalled a discussion of either statewide testing or accommodations during an IEP team meeting.

P: *“Como va el niño, en que va atrasado y que es lo que tiene que estudiar. Que es lo que le falta aprender mas porque a mejorado.”*

I: “She said that yes, what the child is learning, what he’s learned, where he needs work, he’s improved here.”

P: *“Este la maestra cuando mi niño necesita algo, así que no esta aprendiendo, ella lo pone mas enfrente de con ella.”*

I: “She says that in terms of learning, that whenever she [teacher] feels the child needs more attention or isn’t learning, she’ll move him up to the front [of the classroom].”

P: *“No, nomas hablan pues de la entrevista que va haber, y de quienes lo estan ayudando porque ya lo estan ayudando aparte de su maestro tiene mas ayuda. De acomodamiento no. De darle mas tiempo, no.”*

I: “He said no, that mostly they talk about the plan, what is being taught, what they’re going to [do], the goals, objectives, who is going to be working with the child, but accommodations like giving him more time are not mentioned.”

- **Parents at the elementary school indicated that some teachers asked them questions about their culture.** Parents of elementary-aged children indicated that they had some opportunities to share information about their child’s culture at school. This was not the case for children whose disabilities were the most severe. Speaking generally, parents welcomed more opportunities to explain their cultural heritage at school.

P: *“Nada mas que idioma habla uno en su casa. Ya hablando el idioma ya mas o menos se dan una idea. Le preguntan a uno de la culture.”*

I: “She said that they do ask her about customs and stuff like that, specific questions. And she says that once they realize that she, that the child speaks Spanish, that they begin to have an idea of her customs.”

P: *“No, no habido la oportunidad. Nunca me han preguntado nada, ni la maestro de mi niña. Si me dijieran, sí pues claro.”*

I: “He said no, that he hasn’t really had that opportunity. He said that if he did have the opportunity, that yes of course.”

- **There was no pattern in responses about whether Spanish-speaking and English-speaking parents mingled and communicated at school events.** When at school, some Spanish- and English-speaking parents communicated either with or without someone to interpret. In some cases, their children interpreted so that parents could understand

one another. Other parents indicated that parents only communicated with other parents whose native languages were the same.

P: *“Pues de mi parte yo con personas de mi habla porque yo no hablo inglés.”*

I: “He said he only speaks to Spanish-speaking parents because he doesn’t speak English.”

P: *“Pues la mayor parte es en español, en español. Hay personas que si hablan, hay unas que si entendemos lo basico, esas si se comunican. Sí, pero mas español.”*

I: “She said that mostly in Spanish. Yes, Spanish. That there are some people that do speak, some that understand the basics, those people do communicate. But that it is mostly Spanish.”

P: *“Algunas veces, algunas veces cuando uno les puede (unintelligible) los niños de uno le sirven de interprete. Nomas que todos, no siempre, las maestras tienen a una asistente que habla español. Entonces ella es la que me ayuda siempre.”*

I: “She said mostly if they need one [interpreter], they can use one of the teaching assistants. Sometimes they do use the child to translate but only sometimes.”

P: *“Solamente que sea una junta important, que me interese, como tengo que trabajar no puedo estar pidiendo tiempo para venir a juntas que son, que...no me interesen y no le van a ayudar a mi hijo.”*

I: “She says that she only comes to meetings that are of great interest to her. That most of the other parent meetings she doesn’t come to unless it’s very important or directly related to her child...She doesn’t usually come to school because it’s too difficult to balance work and has to ask for time off.”

- **Overall, parents at the elementary school had no suggestions for improving communication.** The parents interviewed for this project were well satisfied with communication with their child’s teachers.

P: *“No pues llevamos buena comunicación. Hasta ahorita nos ha ido bien.”*

I: “She said no, that the communication is good and up until now it has gone quite well.”

Parents of English Language Learners with Disabilities at the Middle School. Eight themes of results emerged from the analysis of the interviews with parents of English language learners with disabilities who were middle school age.

- **Parents of English language learners with disabilities at the middle school reported infrequent communication with their child’s teachers.** Frequency of communication between teachers and parents ranged from approximately once a month to twice a year

among the middle school parents interviewed for this project. Typically, teachers contacted parents by telephone to make arrangements for a formal meeting at school. There were few instances of informal communication between parents and teachers. For the most part, teachers contacted parents by telephone; parents rarely called teachers first. Parents tended to only talk to those teachers who contacted them, and when meeting, only discussed teacher concerns about their children's inappropriate behavior or inadequate academic progress. Those parents who communicated more frequently with their children's teachers thought teachers were generally available to them, but still relied on teachers to initiate the contact.

P: *"Casí dos veces por año. Me gusta personalmente."*

I: "About twice a year. She likes it in person. When there's open house she might take advantage to have a meeting with the teacher."

P: *"Ah, a veces. [unintelligible] una vez al mes."*

I: "Ah, sometimes. [unintelligible] once a month."

P: *"Ah lo que pasa es que yo al principio estuve viniendo aquí a la escuela como dos veces al mes al salón de [student's name] y trataba de hablar con la consejera. También he hablado con la principal y también este hacia, trataba de hacer una junta para ver porque mi hijo [son's name] porque en esta escuela estaba teniendo tantas dificultades quería saber si le podían dar especiales."*

I: "She said that she started coming here about twice a month, had been coming here twice a month, and that she had meetings with the counselor as well as the principal and had tried to set up meetings to find out why it was that he was having so much difficulty at this school or to see if she could get her child special help."

- **Some middle school parents were well informed about educational procedures and terms while other parents were not at all informed.** Parents of middle school-aged students fell into two groups according to their level of information about their child's schooling. The first group demonstrated complete awareness of the term "IEP" as the paperwork that contained their child's instructional goals. These same parents recognized the state test when asked, often indicating that their older children had taken the test in previous school years. While none of them understood system accountability as the purpose of statewide testing, they did indicate that the test measured their child's academic progress in specific content areas. Further, they understood the purpose of accommodations appropriately. One parent even generated an example of a test accommodation as a test that was administered with breaks for her child. On the other hand, another group of parents indicated that they were not familiar with the terms "IEP" or "accommodation" even when descriptions were provided in basic English and interpreted in Spanish. There was some uncertainty as to whether they had received a Spanish translation of their

children's IEPs. Most parents who did not recognize the term "IEP" reported that they did not read papers that they received even when translated versions were sent to them at home. Across these two groups of parents who were either informed or not informed, no parent recalled discussing their child's participation in statewide testing during an IEP team meeting.

P: *"Me parece que me dijo la consejera."*

I: "I think the counselor told me about it [state test]."

P: *"Sí, yeah. Una carta que envían los maestros a casa."*

I: "She said yeah, they found out through the teachers, through a letter that they send home."

P: *"Sí, ese [state test] sí. Me hicieron un [IEP], como se dice, creo que hacen un examen cada cierto tiempo después le hicieron un examen y escribieron según las metas que el [unintelligible] pero ahorita este el nada más tiene una clase especial."*

I: "Yes, that one [state test] yes. She said that yes that she had them [IEP] at home, and then she talked about how, based on the test he takes every so often, that the teachers develop goals, and that at present he only has one special education class."

P: *"Sí mandaron unos papeles. O sí, si agarro? Mas bien no lo hemos leído."*

I: "They've got some papers in the mail, but they're not familiar with it. Actually, he hasn't read it so he's not really..."

- **Parents did not recall any teachers asking questions about their culture in order to better understand their children.**

No parent at the middle school recalled being asked about their cultural background so that teachers with a non-Hispanic background could better understand their Spanish-speaking students' customs and values. At one point, when their children first entered the middle school, parents recalled being asked what language(s) were spoken most frequently at home. But otherwise, parents were not invited to share any cultural information with their children's teachers.

P: *"Pues no hay, no se, creo que no."*

I: "Well there aren't any, I don't know, I don't think so."

- **Spanish-speaking parents at the middle school did not mingle with English-speaking parents at school events.** For the most part, parents of middle school-age children typically attended only those events at school to which they were invited to specifically talk about their own child. Since these events were usually attended by only one family

at a time, they were generally unable to indicate whether Spanish- and English-speaking parents communicated with one another.

P: *“No, porque a veces que nada mas que llegamos uno y nada mas esta un papa y se va. Y llegan los otros, y no, nunca. Es raro cuando estan juntos.”*

I: “She said that it’s rare for the whole group to be there together. That usually it’s one parent there, then they leave, then you come in, then you leave, then someone else comes in. It’s rare to have the group together.”

- **Some Spanish-speaking parents assumed that communication through an interpreter was well understood while others were less certain.** When asked, parents responded that Spanish-speaking parents and English-speaking teachers understood one another through interpreters. Yet, no parents described ways in which they checked teachers’ comprehension or teachers checked to make sure that parents comprehended. Some parents emphasized that communicating with Spanish-speaking teachers was easier than communicating with English-speaking teachers because interactions were more straightforward and less problematic. These parents reported understanding only some of what was said to them through an interpreter while thinking that English-speaking teachers understood only some of what was interpreted to them. One parent indicated that an advocate from an outside agency generally interpreted for her who made sure that she understood all that was said in English.

P: *“Pues yo me imagino que sí. Y esta la maestra, digamos, a un lado, me imagino que...esta diciendo lo que dice la maestra.”*

I: “She assumes that the teacher is right next to the interpreter, that obviously...she imagines the translator is repeating what the teacher is saying.”

P: *“Pues por ejemplo cuando es un persona que habla español, sí. Pero cuando es una persona que habla inglés, yo pienso que a la mejor no, porque como yo no hablo el idioma, no nos podemos entender.”*

I: “She said that when it’s a Spanish-speaking teacher, she feels that yes, but when it’s an English-speaking teacher, because she doesn’t speak English, that she can’t really communicate as well, they can’t understand each other.”

P: *“Unas cosas, y otras no. Yo creo que la mitad, cincuenta y cincuenta.”*

I: “She said some things, and other things not. She says she feels like about half, fifty-fifty.”

- **A few parents were frustrated by the lack of available interpreters for informal communication with middle school staff.** There were instances where parents described situations at school where their home language impeded clarification of their specific

questions about their child. Both times, parents attempted to communicate with office personnel when no interpreter was readily available. Unfortunately, parents either spent a lengthy amount of time waiting for an interpreter, or in another situation, attempted to communicate with school staff using a student to interpret. In both cases, parents were not able to understand the answers to their questions.

P: *La mayoría de maestros no hablan español...O sea que para hablar para andar buscando quien le interprete.”*

I: “Their lack of language...there’s a language barrier because the majority of teachers speak English. And that it’s difficult to find somebody who will interpret for them.”

- **Overall, parents indicated that their native language was a barrier to good communication between parents and teachers at the middle school.** When asked to recommend suggestions for improving family and school communication, various parents suggested ensuring effective communication through consistently available Spanish-speaking staff who would not require interpretation to field their questions.

P: *“Casí he hablado con un maestro que habla español.”*

I: “She said that she’s...almost always spoken with a male teacher who speaks Spanish.”

P: *“Como tambien yo quiero así como venir a platicar con nomas para saber si mi niño ocupa de veras los libros que trae en la mochila porque esta muy pesada y llega con doloron de cabeza de que la trae cargando. Y como se va caminando y llega con la cabeza que no la aguanta, es tiempo de (unintelligible) de que le duele aquí mucho.”*

I: “She said she has had questions or concerns like, she would like to ask a teacher is it necessary for him to carry all the books, because the child has come home with backaches, bad headache, because the backpack’s so heavy, but because she doesn’t know how to communicate with the school, she just won’t ask. And so those are things she finds important to ask, but there’s a language barrier.”

- **Parents suggested that communication could be improved with more Spanish-speaking staff at the middle school.** The only suggestion that a few parents made to improve communication between themselves and the school was to make sure that Spanish-speaking staff were readily available to serve as interpreters. Two parents described unfortunate situations at school that could have been resolved with an interpreter. One parent stopped in the school office with a concern about her child. She waited for at least 30 minutes, had only a student to interpret her question, and left without resolution to her issue.

P: *“Pues solo agusto que nos hablaran en español.”*

I: “Well, I would be most comfortable if they spoke to us in Spanish.”

Parents of English Language Learners with Disabilities in the High School . The results of a group interview of parents of English language learners with disabilities who attended the high school yielded nine themes, which are described and followed by selected supportive quotations.

- **Parents of ELLs with disabilities communicated infrequently with teachers at the high school.** Most of the parents in this group interview indicated that they rarely communicated with teachers at school. In fact, many parents did not know the general education teachers' names even though their children were included in classes with their peers without disabilities. They did know the special education teacher's name and reported that they did communicate with him whenever they were requested to do so. Parents also reported the same for the speech teacher. Otherwise, parents seemed to not know specific high school teachers and their roles at school. Conferences at school were prearranged with the teacher typically contacting the parents by telephone, although some parents in the group indicated that they had not received phone calls from the school. All parents did report that they communicated more frequently with elementary and middle school teachers.

P: *“Pues de lo que yo me puedo hacer entender con el maestro pero no se como se llama. El le ayuda mucho para que se quede despues de la escuela, en las tareas. Claro, mi niño en veces reniega pero el mismo reconoce que es para ayudarle pero no se. No se me puede grabar el nombre del maestro. Mi hijo se queda seguido a clases especiales pero su maestro es un japonesito, el no habla nada de español, y yo no hablo nada de ingles, entonces no se pero se que con uno de ellos.”*

I: “She mentioned that there’s communication between her and an Asian teacher, but because he speaks English and she speaks Spanish, that it’s difficult to communicate.”

P: *Because in elementary, they call me every six months at our meeting with the teacher, psychologist, and special teacher. But here I don’t have no one. I have, I had one time with speech teacher because I asked him, not because he called.” [bilingual parent]*

- **When parents communicated with high school staff, they tended to focus on one specific concern about their adolescent.** Parents who frequently initiated contact with the school tended do so about one concern. For instance, one parent whose daughter tended not to attend school called the school office every school day to make sure that her daughter was in class. Otherwise, she reported infrequent communication with her daughter’s teachers.

P: *“Yo con la chiquilla me, cada que va a la escuela yo hablo todas las mañanas para ver si se presento. Y yo se cuando viene y cuando no viene porque yo hablo con la escuela.”*

I: “She says that she calls every morning to make sure her daughter has shown up to school, and that she’s pretty aware of most instances, of almost all instances when she’s here and when she’s not. But she’s pretty aware because she’s calling the school in the mornings.”

P: *“Como yo en mi caso, okay, el de dieciséis años, yo vivía en [city name] y apenas me vine en noviembre para aca. Y con, lo puse en la escuela, y yo he mirado que si le ponen mucho interes a mi hijo porque el nomas vino dos semanas y ya no quizo venir. Por el mismo problema que el tiene del aprendizaje. O sea, el no puede aprender, por mas que trate no puede. Entonces, el dice, porque viene a la escuela si no puede. Entonces los maestros, de noviembre aquí he tendio como quince citas con los maestros, en reunions. Entonces, el dice que no quiere venir porque lo dejan en verguenza, que lo ponen a leer y no sabe leer. Entonces, este, yo lo que he tratado de que lo metan en un programa de que alguien vaya a la casa y trate de ayudarlo porque el por el mismo problema se ha querido quitar la vida.”*

I: “She said that she moved here from [city name] and has noticed that at this site they pay more attention to her child, and for that reason [the child] hasn’t been wanting to go to school because they pay more attention to him. That the attention has embarrassed him because he can’t read and they call on him to read in class. That he’s very discouraged because he understands his learning disability. That he has it and that it’s very difficult for him. He’s embarrassed when they ask him to read and he can’t. So she’s saying she’s met here about 15 times with various people to try to address the situation. She’s trying to get him in a program where he can stay home and they can come to teach him.”

- **Parents’ perceptions of how frequently the school contacted them regarding their adolescent varied widely.** Throughout the conversation, it became clearer that parents had different perceptions and expectations for how often the high school contacted them. Some parents indicated that school staff contacted them regularly while other parents said that they either rarely or never called them. Most parents seemed to use elementary and middle schools as their reference for how often the school was contacting them, and thus wished for more frequent contact from the high school. They did seem to understand that it was, in part, their responsibility to initiate communication with teachers themselves.

P: *“Cuando hace esas juntas, ellos le llaman a usted o usted las pide? No, ellos me hablan. Se hacen cada...Esas clases, cuando dependiendo del...Sí porque no me han llamado para ninguna. En [state name] cuando ella estaba mas chiquita yo tiene en veces citas mas frecuentes pero las mandaban.” [conversation between parents]*

I: “She asked her how often she has those meetings, and when she has them, who calls her. She responded by saying that the school calls her and then she said, ‘Well, they haven’t called me.’ And then she added that she just moved here from [state name] and how the meetings here aren’t as frequent as they were in [state name] where she appeared to have more frequent meetings regarding her special needs child and they let her know by sending notices.”

- **Most parents needed verbal descriptions to be able to recognize special education procedures and terms.** Parents in this group only recognized the terms “IEP” and “accommodation” after a verbal description was interpreted to them in Spanish. All parents were aware of meetings where the IEP document was discussed, but only a few parents were able to recall discussions about learning and test accommodations. Parents were able to generate examples of test accommodations such as small group administration and extended test time, but did not do so until prompted. In terms of the process of developing an IEP, parents indicated that they understood that they would be contacted annually to attend a meeting at school with various teachers and that they would receive a translated copy of the IEP in the mail at home. They also recalled signing the document with their child present who also signed the IEP.

P: *“O sí, sí. Uh-hmm, la conferencia con la otra niña mía, la chiquita. Sí, aquí no he venido.”*

I: “She said that okay, now she knows what it is, and that she’s been to those meetings with her younger daughter. An that she hasn’t come to one here.”

P: *“A estas de aquí no.”*

I: “They have not come to meetings here.”

P: *“¿De qué? ¿Acomodaciones? Sí se que es, como, como, el progreso de cada niño que lo van a quitar de ese programa y lo van a poner en (unintelligible)...”*

I: “What? Accommodations? She talked about whether they were letting her know whether the child was progressing or not, and whether they were going to take him out of the special education program.”

- **Overall, parents were aware of their children’s participation in statewide testing.** When asked about the state administered test, all parents in this group interview indicated familiarity with the SAT-9. Although not recalling any discussion about test participation during the IEP team meeting or written information within the child’s IEP regarding the

state test, all parents were aware of the test from either older siblings or from information about preparing their child for test day that was mailed to their home. A few parents reported discussions with their child about what the school was doing to maximize test performance.

P: “¿O un examen del estado? O sí. Sí.”

I: “Oh, the state test? Oh, yes. Yes.”

- **High school students tended to be either “success stories” or “crisis stories.”** There were times in the group interview process when parents began speaking about their individual children that pointed to the wide disparity between student experiences. Two parents described severe social issues with their children with disabilities that had resulted in violent acts directed to themselves or others. Other parents reported that their children were beginning to understand and verbalize their frustration with having a disability that embarrassed them at school. Their families attributed their students’ reluctance or refusal to go to school to these experiences. On the other hand, another parent described her child’s effort and perseverance to excel in spite of a disability. In this case, academic success is resulting in a scholarship for post-secondary education. No parent reported school experiences that fell between the extremes of success and crisis for their students.

P: “A la mía si le gusta mucho venir a la escuela. Ella dice ahorita que sus maestros son muy buenas personas y los quiere much. Y, a ella le gusta mucho venir a la escuela. Ella incluso pide una aplicación para venir a summer school para mejorar.”

I: “She mentioned that her daughter really likes school, that she enjoys it, has nothing but good things to say. She likes her teachers and that she voluntarily signs up for summer school.”

P: “Mi hija si le gusta venir a la escuela nada mas hay un clase donde le hablan puro inglés y la hacen que hable. Me dice que la cambie de allí.”

I: “She mentioned that her daughter likes school, too. Likes it very much, except for one course where it’s too difficult and they only speak English. The daughter has asked her mom to switch her out of the class.”

P: “Pero el ahorita no viene a la escuela. Le dieron treinta diaz para que pueda encontrar el doctor, un psyciatra, para, porque le estaban dando medicamento. Pero el psyciatra que le estaba medicando el medicamento en vez de darle la medicina para el [unintelligible] le estaba dando para la alta presion, sobre nada le servia, al contrario lo alteraba. Por dos años estuvo tomando ese medicamento, y ahora que se quiso quitar la vida se tomo diez pastillas. En el hospital fue donde me dijieron que esa no era medicina para el, que esa era para la alta presion que me lo estaban matando. En vez de ponerlo a que el entendiera, los estimulantes fueron perdiendo dos años. El no volvió a venir a la escuela.”

I: “She said that at present he’s on medication, he’s not attending school, that he had been seeing a psychiatrist that had been giving him the wrong medication, that he tried to take his life recently, and that he’s hospitalized at the moment, because they had given him the medication for high blood pressure which was to calm him down, when in reality that’s not what he needed. When he was hospitalized, they realized that the doctor had given him the wrong medication. So she’s currently trying to find the doctor to give him the right medication.”

P: *“El miedo de que les van hacer algo y el temor de que no pueden aprender con la pena. Entonces los pone, los pone en depresión. Porque yo se que el mio es depresion porque me dice, “No, no voy a al escuela’. El duerme todo el día. El no es un muchacho que se me va a la calle que anda de vago, que la policia anda buscando. El nomas dormir, dormir. Y cuando se levanta que le empiezo a decir la escuela es cuando se me pone violento y luego destruye toda su ropa. So tengo que estar con el.”*

I: So, with the fear of, with that kind of fear, as well as the embarrassment of being in school, it makes him not want to attend...and she says that he’s not a bad child. That he stays home, but what he does do a lot of is sleep, sleep. When she does wake him up and say, hey, it’s time to go to school, that’s when he gets violent and starts ripping stuff up, throwing things around. So she needs to be around him.”

- **Hispanic English proficient parents experience communication difficulties with the high school.** One fully proficient English speaker who has a Mexican heritage and is raising English-speaking children with disabilities typically receives written communication from the high school that is translated into Spanish. Since she was raised in an English-speaking environment, she is not literate in Spanish. Even when using a dictionary, she has difficulty comprehending the Spanish narrative. Spanish-speaking school staff also place phone calls to the family, which are not understood by her fully proficient English-speaking children. Even though each family member had Mexican names, they did not need interpreters or translations since Spanish is not their dominant or preferred language.

P: *“They think sometimes they’ll send me a letter in Spanish. And that’s one thing about the schools. They just go by the last names and they don’t even see if they speak Spanish or English. They call the house sometimes and they talk to him [son], and they’re like, “We don’t know what you’re talking about. We don’t understand Spanish.” And sometimes, I don’t understand why they just look at the last name and go ahead and send letters in Spanish or call you in Spanish or leave messages in Spanish.” [bilingual parent]*

- **Parents tended to only speak to other Spanish-speaking parents on the rare occasions that they attended school functions.** When this group of parents was at school, they tended to seek out only Spanish-speaking parents to engage in conversation. There was no indication that Spanish- and English-speaking parents mingled in conversation during school activities. For example, when the bilingual interpreter asked whether a parent spoke to English- or Spanish-speaking parents at school (“Por eso, si se sienta a platicar, en ingles on en espanol?”), the interpreted response was, “He said yeah, they just sit down and chat, and they’ll chat in Spanish.” Within the group interview, there were three parents who indicated that they had never attended a school activity.

P: *“No, no he venido. Es primer año que mi niño ha estado aquí. Pos yo no he venido.”*

I: No, no I haven’t come. It’s my son’s first year here, and no I haven’t come.

- **Parents of high school-age students requested more group meetings where they could interact with one another.** When asked how communication between the high school and families could be improved, parents suggested more meetings that were more like the group interview. It seemed as though they enjoyed the interaction with each other in an open-ended approach to discussion of specific issues. Even when some parents raised complaints about a service provision for their child, other parents took issue by defending special education programming in particular and the school in general. By doing so, parents supported and learned from one another through thought provoking and challenging feedback.

P: *“Pues yo pienso que sí, que nos hagan mas reunions.”*

I: “That yes, more conferences more often. More meetings like this one.”

P: *“Yeah. We want to know what happens to our kids. But you know, it takes a long time. And most of us work and have things to do, too. One hour with all the [people] is good.”*
[bilingual parent]

P: *“No pos, esta bien así porque yo pensaba que era la unica que tenía problemas con mi hija. Y luego que veo que hay problemas mas grandes que los de mi hija.”*

I: “She said that yes, it’s good, because she felt that she was the only one that had this issue [with her child] and that showing up here helps her see that there’s other people with the same problem or larger problems.”

Parents of English Language Learners who Attended an Additional High School Site.

Three findings emerged from the results of the interviews with the parents of English language learners who attended the Poly Academy of Accelerated Learning (PAAL).

- **Communication was impeded by non-Spanish speaking staff.** Parents said that it was difficult to communicate with English-speaking PAAL staff when interpreters were not readily available for informal conversations. Sometimes students would interpret for their parents, but formal communication was described as more efficient because interpreters facilitate Spanish-English conversations.

P: *“Cuando ellos me han citado yo siempre he venido. Cuando me citan para la, la, es como una junta de cada año por sus clases especiales siempre he acudido. O sea cuando ellos me citan yo siempre vengo. Pero ya despues así que vengo que yo quiera hablar con ellos, no. Nomás cuando ellos me citan yo vengo, yo acudo.”*

I: “She said that whenever they make appointments or there are some conferences, and she mentioned the annual conference, that yes, she comes. But then she says that whenever she needs to or wants to, that, no [she does not come].”

P: *“No, una vez por semana no. Puede ser como cuando ellas necesitan hablar conmigo, ellas me hablan a la casa. Ya entonces yo hablo, pero una porque a veces no hablan español yo no, o sea cuando yo necesito algo, (child’s name) les dice y ellas me hablan o buscan quién interprete.”*

I: “She said, ‘Once a week, no.’ She said that if they need something, they will call her or if she needs something, she’ll call to make an appointment. And that most of the time, because they don’t speak Spanish, she won’t, or if she needs something, she’ll tell her daughter and she’ll let the teachers know and they’ll call and find someone to translate.”

- **Spanish-speaking parents found school materials difficult to comprehend even when translated into Spanish.** Even when materials that described school procedures and policies are written in Spanish, parents still indicated that it was difficult to understand the meaning. Parents were literate in Spanish, but some educational terms have different meanings when translated into Spanish, or in some cases, English words cannot be translated into Spanish at all.

P: *“Sí, porque me entregan como un, siempre me entregan un paquetito así en español, como en mi idioma para que yo lo entienda. Que es lo que, que progreso ella va teniendo algo así. Sí, cada año me lo entregan.”*

I: “She says that every year they give her a small packet with materials in Spanish so that she can understand. And just letting her know how she’s progressing. That, yes, every year they give her a packet.”

P: *“A veces sí porque aunque este en español, ellos como...estan explicado como que no lo puedo entender.”*

I: “She said that, yes, even though it’s written in Spanish, sometimes it’s written in such a way that she can’t understand it.”

- **Parents who attended parent-teacher conferences wished for discussions beyond their students’ academic progress.** This group of parents indicated that they attended pre-arranged conferences when requested to do so and for which they expressed gratitude. While they thought that it was important to remain updated about their children’s academic progress, they expressed a need to discuss other topics that pertained to their children’s social behavior at school.

P: *“Pues en todo lo demas ella va bien, en matematicas, pero yo en eso es lo que me deprime a mi como madre. Yo eso de que leer y escribir, ella puede, nunca le he visto el progreso, nunca le he visto el avance. Y este, yo me deprimo mucho, mucho porque, o sea yo venía a las juntas y las maestras me dicen, sí esta aprendiendo pero yo como madre la veo siempre, siempre en la casa y no. Y me sentía mal porque es como, yo a veces sentía como discriminación. Porque a veces yo queria expresar lo que sentía, y los que estaban allí, cuando el interprete decía, no pero es que ellos dicen que nomas ellos le estan diciendo lo que ella va progresando y como diciendo, no queiren hablar como de lo que yo estoy sintiendo.”*

I: “She said that this is something that has always caused her concern. Because she has seen growth in other areas like math, but it’s frustrating...and depressing...and it’s really gotten to her, was the fact that the reading and writing were not coming along. And she said that it was also frustrating to be at meetings and have the translator not really help her, because it seemed that the people at the IEP meetings only wanted to talk about what they needed to talk about. They didn’t want to talk about what she was feeling or what she was thinking.”

English Language Learners with Disabilities. Students at the elementary school (n = 7), middle school (n = 7), and high school (n = 8) were interviewed face to face. Their responses to each interview question are summarized in Table 7. Frequencies (the number of responses/total number of students interviewed) are included for all responses to each question by school level. The number of “no responses” is also included for each interview question by school level.

Across the three schools, students generally recognized the name of the state test. All English language learners with disabilities at the high school were aware of the test. According to students at all three schools, teachers informed them about statewide testing, along with family members and newspapers making elementary students aware of the test, and friends at the high school

sharing this information. Only some of the elementary age students understood the purpose of the state test, but the middle and high school age students understood the purpose well. All of the student responses indicated that they took the state test in English.

Most of the English language learners with disabilities at all three schools were not aware of the term “test accommodations.” With additional probing, that in some cases included providing examples of accommodations, students were able to identify the accommodations that they used during testing. All students indicated that these accommodations were helpful.

Overall, most of the students across the three schools recognized the term “IEP meeting” and indicated that they had attended a meeting. There was less awareness about whether state tests and test accommodations were discussed at their IEP team meetings.

Table 7. English Language Learners with Disabilities Interview Responses by School.

	<i>School</i>		
	<i>Elementary</i>	<i>Middle</i>	<i>High</i>
Have the students heard of the state test?	Yes (5/7) No response: 1/7	Yes (5/7) No response: 0/7	Yes (6/8) No response: 0/8
How did the students hear about the state test?	Teachers (3/7) Family (2/7) Newspapers (1/7) No response: 3/7	Teachers (4/7) No response: 3/7	Teachers (6/8) Friends (1/8) No response: 1/8
Do the students understand the purpose of the state test?	Yes (2/7) No (2/7) No response: 3/7	Yes (5/7) No response: 2/7	Yes (4/8) No response: 3/8
In what language do the students take the state tests?	English (1/7) No response: 6/7	English (3/7) No response: 4/7	English (4/8) No response: 4/8
Have the students heard of test accommodations?	No (5/7) No response: 2/7	No (6/7) No response: 0/7	No (7/8) No response: 0/8
Can the students offer personal examples of accommodations?	Yes (4/7) No response: 3/7	Yes (6/7) No response: 1/7	Yes (5/8) No response: 2/8
Do accommodations assist the student when taking the state test?	Yes (3/7) No response: 4/7	Yes (4/7) No response: 3/7	Yes (4/8) No response: 4/8
Have the students heard of an IEP meeting?	Yes (2/7) No response: 4/7	Yes (5/7) No response: 0/7	Yes (7/8) No response: 0/8
Do the students attend IEP meetings?	Yes (2/7) No response: 4/7	Yes (5/7) No response: 0/7	Yes (3/8) No response: 4/8
Are the state tests and accommodations discussed at the IEP meetings?	Yes (1/7) No (1/7) No response: 5/7	No (4/7) No response: 2/7	Yes (3/8) No (3/8) No response: 2/8

There was one student in particular who, as a first grader, was too young to participate in our student interviews. Her remarkable academic success in general education is worth noting; especially in light of her relatively recent exposure to learning English as a young child with autism.

Amazing Megan

This unique story is shared to assist and inspire teachers in believing that all students have the ability to exceed even the highest expectations.

My mother takes me to school in the morning, and school begins at 7:55 A.M. I start the day in Ms. W's classroom where I put away my things and do other beginning-of-the-day activities. Then, around 8:30 A.M., I go to Ms. J's classroom with my homework in hand, ready to put it in the homework box. My mom helped me with my homework last night; I know that it is correct and I am proud! I show Ms. J before I turn it in. She is proud, too! After I turn in my homework, I sit down by my friends, and I'm ready to begin my work. We begin with math today. Sometimes when we do math, I use counters or a numberline to help me do my work. Sometimes an aide from Ms. J's classroom comes and helps me. Today I'm working with another 1st grader who always does really well at school, and helps me do well too. Next, we have a spelling test. I studied last night, so I am ready and I do well. I tell Ms. J what a great job I did when I turn in my test. One hundred percent, I say, and she smiles and says excellent job, Megan. Walking back to my table I see Christina crying. I put my arm around her and give her a little hug before returning to my seat. We read a book about Mexico today in class. Ms. J calls us her Spanish teachers. She says that she learns a lot from us, even though she is the teacher. After the story, we do reading on our own, and my job as the table captain is to go get the reading books for the whole table. Bringing them to the table, I say "Piiizzaa!" like I am a pizza delivery girl. Everyone laughs, including me—it was funny! I finish the day in Ms. W's classroom, where my mom picks me up. She talks with Ms. W for a little bit before we go home.

This is the personal account of a typical school day for Megan Mendes, a first grade student of Hispanic origin who has autism. Megan is included in general education instruction; Ms. W is her special education teacher, and Ms. J is her general education teacher. Below is Ms. J's testimony of her experience with Megan in the general education classroom.

I was a little nervous at first when I found out that I was going to have an English language learner with a disability in my classroom. This is only my second year teaching and I never taught a unique student like Megan in my class. But, I talked almost daily with Ms. W about Megan, and discussed how I could modify my instruction to best sup-

port Megan's learning. She shared with me lots of ideas and alternative activities, and emphasized how amazing Megan is. She suggested that we start Megan in my class right at the beginning of the year. Even though I was hesitant about this immediate placement, I think that starting the year with me was beneficial for her. Now, I talk less often with Ms. W because I am comfortable with instructing Megan, but we always share stories and continue to have excellent collaboration.

And the network of collaboration continues, as I believe Ms. W has regular contact with Megan's parents. I met Megan's parents once at an IEP meeting. The meeting was translated from English to Spanish to assist her parents' understanding. I always feel more comfortable having a translator when working with parents who speak a language other than English. Having a translator facilitates better communication so that they understand me and I understand them. It also helps to set expectations up front in what we wish to accomplish, and provide written materials and documents so that the parents can see, as well as hear, what is going on with their child. Megan's parents were very involved in the meeting and asked questions when they did not understand. I also got a glimpse of Megan's life at home, and the obvious loving relationship between Megan and her parents. There's a lot of support there. Every time something positive was said about Megan, they gave her a hug, and she was very receptive to that. During downtimes in the meeting, her father played games and talked with her while she sat on his lap. I was just so pleased, I mean, it is obvious that there is a lot of love and support from the parents, and it shows in Megan.

Megan's progress this year has been outstanding. She is gaining greater independence through familiarity with the daily routine and classroom rules. I have greatly cut back the instructional modifications I provide for her, and have increased my expectations that she continues to meet. Now that it is near the end of the school year, she is performing at grade level in math, and at an early second grade level in reading. My goodness, she's performing above grade level in spite of her exceptionalities! That is an incredible accomplishment for any student, but especially for an English language learner with disabilities. She's becoming increasingly verbal, using complete sentences and correct proper nouns. She has even demonstrated her wonderful sense of humor and compassion for others at school. To the outside observer, she does not have a disability, and, at times, I wonder that myself.

These personal accounts describe a truly exceptional English language learner with a disability. Megan has the desire to learn and the drive to do her best and it is apparent in her work. She always puts forth effort, shows pride in her work, and takes her responsibilities very seriously. She is the product of an educational intersection between a loving and supportive family and loving and supportive educators.

Teachers. There are four overall areas of thematic findings that were derived from the results of the face-to-face interviews with the elementary, middle, and high school teachers. These areas include (I) teacher-parent communication, (II) large-scale assessments, (III) special education procedures, and (IV) other language learning. Within each of these four areas, we further organized the themes into categories for clearer presentation. All themes are then followed by supportive quotations taken directly from the teachers' responses.

I. Teacher-Parent Communication

Within the general area of teacher-parent communication, our content analysis yielded seven categories of thematic findings, which illuminate across and within school differences.

(1) Communication Form.

❖ **Teachers used formal or informal and verbal or written approaches when communicating with parents of English language learners with disabilities.**

“It’s...a communication book. I’ll write something and then she’ll write back. [I] write maybe two to three times a week. Some more than others...some students almost every day. Just depending on the student...some students require more communication.”
— special education elementary school teachers

“Some of our parents drop their students off in the morning and pick them up from their classrooms. So, if I’m on guard duty, I’ll go out and meet parents when they drop their students off...or I’ll go to the classroom when their parents pick them up at the end of the day. Sometimes I will call them. Some of our parents work so they give us their work numbers. They ask us to call them at work. I interact with them during IEP meetings when they come. I’m part of parent conferences.” — special education elementary school teacher

“I communicate with them [parents] daily by phone. They walk in or sometimes when I can’t reach them by phone, I’ll mail a letter to them or send our community workers to their house.” — special education middle school teacher

“When we have IEP meetings of course, and on the phone.” — special education middle school teacher

“We do weekly [written] reports so that every Friday something goes out to the parents. And they [parents] sign it in both languages—English and Spanish.” — English language development middle school teacher

(2) Initiating Communication.

- ❖ **Some teachers perceived themselves as typically initiating contact with parents of English language learners with disabilities on an informal basis.**

“It’s usually the school contacting parents.” — English language development middle school teacher

“There are very few parents, I think, that... feel comfortable calling the school [whether parents of] English language learners or non-English language learners.” — general middle education teacher

“They never contact me. I always contact them [parents].” — high school special education teacher

- ❖ **In contrast, other teachers reported that parents initiated contact with them.**

“Typically the students arrive on the bus...but I do have parents that come in. We can translate [interpret] here.” — special education elementary school teacher

“...also a lot of parents will contact me, and so we conference.” — general education middle school teacher

“It’s both ways—I call them and they call me.” — special education middle school teacher

“Traditionally I would agree, but this year I’ve had...a couple of my parents who have made a strong effort to contact me even though they’re not English speaking.” — high school special education teacher

- ❖ **Spanish-speaking teachers at the middle school report that Spanish-speaking parents do not initiate contact with them.**

“We both speak Spanish, but yet our parents still don’t call—so that is kind of odd.” — general education middle school teacher

(3) Interpreter Use.

- ❖ **Interpreters work with parents of English language learners with disabilities through a variety of communication modes.**

“I have an aide who writes and speaks Spanish, so she’ll usually write in [a communication book] the kind of information I need to give the parent. The parent will write back in Spanish and then my aide will interpret what she said.” — special education elementary school teacher

“I also have a parent educator who speaks Spanish and often times I find it more efficient if she calls on the phone.” — special education elementary school teacher

❖ **Teachers use a formal process in the middle school to request interpreter services.**

“...for purposes of trying to get parents to come to visit, I obviously had to have one of the Spanish-speaking counselors call the parents on their free time because it’s too hard with their [parents] limited English.” — special education middle school teacher

“Or we have a community worker that goes out. We’ll fill out a community worker request form and what we want, and he’ll go out and speak with the parents and get the forms signed, take them [parents] home, or whatever we need.” — special education middle school teacher

“...the counselor, the secretary, and then you go to the counselor who speaks Spanish, and then you go to the community worker, and then you call the social worker. And you just have to keep going down this big long list until you finally get them to understand what you need.” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Process to acquire interpreter could be challenging.**

“For example, Open House night, I had a non-English speaking mother come in. Fortunately, the father spoke [English] a little bit. If they had both been non-English, then I would have gone to get somebody to help interpret.” — special education elementary school teacher

“Sometimes we have to let the child call, because we can’t get an interpreter.” — special education middle school teacher

“It’s hard to get an interpreter sometimes because parents come in at odd times. Anybody that’s interpreting is busy...and they have to sit and wait a long time. Then they’re frustrated and we have to wait until we have a break....They get frustrated, we get frustrated.” — special education middle school teacher

*“We don’t have interpreters available for us in the day-to-day stuff so it’s more difficult.”
— special education middle school teacher*

“The phone is quicker than having to try to send somebody around.” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Teachers use a variety of strategies to communicate with Spanish-speaking parents if no interpreter is available.**

“I’ve had the kids call parents and tell them what they’re doing....I understand enough to know what words to be listening for. And the kids tell...so then they have to tell their parents exactly what it is. The kids rat each other out!” — English language development middle school teacher

“If it’s just for a day-to-day thing like some kind of feedback on what’s go on, I ask my kids to translate for me.” — special education middle school teacher

“Have the kids line up and say, ‘Call your parents and remind them about open house.’ So we even have the kids do some of that.” — special education middle school teacher

(4) Teacher Roles

❖ **Some teachers at the elementary school perceived special educators as communicating more with parents of English language learners with disabilities than other teachers.**

When asked if special education teachers communicated more than general education teachers, a teacher responded, *“I would say probably yes. Just because we [special education teachers] have to keep a closer relationship because of the nature of the disability. And it’s pretty much the only way they’re going to know what their child is doing.” — special education elementary school teacher*

“The child can’t come home and talk about what they’ve been doing.” — special education elementary teacher

“Sometimes I might see parents a little more if it’s a behavior issue [that] I need to address or have to call home.” — special education elementary school teacher

❖ **However, other teachers perceived general educators as communicating more with parents of English language learners with disabilities than other teachers.**

“Probably the general education teacher communicates a little bit more because they see the students for a longer amount of time. You know, for parent conferences.” — special education elementary school teacher

- ❖ **Yet, other teachers perceived communication with parents of English language learners with disabilities to be balanced across the school staff.**

“At our school, all of our teachers who teach English language learners with disabilities communicate with parents themselves. I would say that it is fairly even.” — special education elementary school teacher

- ❖ **At the middle school, there is a sequence of school personnel that relays messages to the special education teacher.**

“In special education we have case managers, so normally they would talk to that. If they can’t get a hold of her, they’ll call me. We have two counselors and we divide the alphabet, so if the student falls in the first half, A through L, they usually call me to relay a message to the special education teacher.” — special education middle school teacher

- ❖ **Collaboration about statewide testing with general education teachers is driven by the type of special education setting.**

“I’m always consulting with the special education teacher [department chair]. She’s a wonderful teacher who knows her laws and everything.” — bilingual middle school guidance counselor

“[I teach] a special day class, so I don’t interact with the regular teachers very much.” — special education high school teacher

“[I teach] a resource classroom, so I interact with the regular teachers. And my students interact with the general population also.” — special education high school teacher

(5) Communication Content.

- ❖ **Elementary school special education teachers tend to focus on day to day details when communicating with English language learners with disabilities.**

“I try to communicate about their behavior and how their work was during the day. If there were any problems with behavior, and then just letting them know about things that are going on in school—the Open House is coming up, their IEP is coming up,

picture day. Things like that. Just to keep them informed of everything that's going on in school.” — special education elementary school teacher

“In general, it's about academic performance or behavior issues.” — special education elementary school teacher

“I spend a certain amount of time just making sure if they need additional support for anything at home, or if we can extend the learning from the classroom to home.” — special education elementary school teacher

❖ **Middle school special education teachers tend to focus on IEP procedures when communicating with parents.**

“I have IEPs, at least 10 a month, and usually it's calling them for setting up the appointment, making sure they're going to come back, calling back again to remind them about the meeting. It's both ways—I call them and they call me.” — special education middle school teacher

“Usually they want to talk about the IEP, the guidelines, they feel their kids are not getting the services that were placed on the IEP. Sometimes they just want to follow up or they don't understand something.” — special education middle school teacher

(6) Communication Strategies.

❖ **Teachers suggested techniques for communicating with parents of English language learners with disabilities.**

“Maybe giving them a heads-up by first sending something home in Spanish and then following up with phone calls.” — special education middle school teacher

“You can't give up. Just keep on trying.” — special education middle school teacher

“Sometimes when I cannot find them I look at the emergency card and call every single person...to relay a message. And then I'll bring the student [in] and say, ‘I need three or four phone numbers. Can you give them to me?’ They usually cooperate. If that doesn't work, always mailing a letter home.” — special education middle school teacher

“...having the community workers available who can go to homes, who do speak Spanish, and can let parents know that we need to reach them.” — special education middle school teacher

(7) Obstacles to Communication.

❖ **Terms specific to American education are difficult for parents of English language learners with disabilities to understand.**

“Vocabulary. Sometimes I have to really watch the vocabulary I use. I forget that they’re not familiar with certain terms—like even just reading benchmarks or being proficient. Sometimes I have to remember to explain the terms that I’m using. You know, sight words, things like that. I have to really watch my vocabulary instead of just using the terms that we use around the school to describe what they actually mean.” — special education elementary school teacher

When responding to an interview question about test accommodations, one teacher reported, *“They might not be able to know...the jargon.” — special education elementary school teacher*

“I was even thinking of just vocabulary and terminology that even if they’re in a meeting and a counselor explains, ‘We have content standards and rubrics.’ The whole vocabulary of school is alien even if you could translate that into their [native] language, it’s hard to grasp these concepts.” — general education middle school teacher

“It’s almost like a private vocabulary at school.” — general education middle school teacher

❖ **Teachers think that the mismatch in native languages causes discomfort with communication.**

“If you were a bilingual speaker, they might open up.” — special education high school teacher

“I think that it’s just a natural thing. They [parents] feel more comfortable [when] communicating with someone that they’re a little bit more familiar with. That they have more in common with.” — special education high school teacher

“I think it’s teachers who are natural Spanish speakers. I think [one] could get a little bit more information. Perhaps a little bit more [of a] comfort level for them.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **Interpreter availability was problematic.**

“...having an interpreter at the meeting or over the telephone.” — special education high school teacher

“I think that it’s just a natural thing. They [parents] feel more comfortable [when] communicating with someone that they’re a little bit more familiar with. That they have more in common with.” — special education high school teacher

“I think it’s teachers who are natural Spanish speakers. I think [one] could get a little bit more information. Perhaps a little bit more [of a] comfort level for them.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **Some parents of English language learners with disabilities did not have literacy skills.**

“I have a parent that can read but can’t write...But she has access to someone to help her read the log. My aide writes in Spanish what’s going on and then someone in her family has written back.” — special education elementary school teacher

“She came in and I gave her the emergency card to fill out. She sat there and looked at it for a while. That’s when an aide or someone came over and read it to her and helped her with it. She didn’t say that she wasn’t literate and it was in Spanish.” — special education elementary school teacher

“Field trips, reminders, school events, open house...Even though the material is in Spanish, sometimes there’s not a reading level there either.” — special education middle school teacher

“The reading level, the non-reading level in English and Spanish. You can send something home in Spanish, but they [parents] don’t read at all...that’s a serious limitation.” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Parents of English language learners with disabilities were difficult to contact.**

Two teachers agreed in saying, *“Sometimes their work schedules, that they may be at work and we may not have a work number during school hours. That’s a big one.” — special education middle school teachers*

“When they change numbers and don’t let us know...” — special education middle school teacher

“Finding them at home. A lot of them you’ll find the phone has been disconnected or it’s out of order.” — special education middle school teacher

“They [families] seem to move often—a lot of our kids do.” — general education middle school teacher

“Incorrect phone numbers.” — general education middle school teacher

“A lot of times the parents are just so busy because they have so many jobs.” — English language development middle school teacher

❖ **Parents of English language learners with disabilities did not necessarily understand how American schools function.**

“I think that a lot of parents don’t really understand how school works, how procedures work, how grading works.” — general education middle school teacher

“They [parents] don’t understand what questions to ask even if they do have questions. They might be confused about something, but not really know how to ask the questions. So I think maybe even critical thinking skill might be an issue as well.” — English language development middle school teacher

“Even reports are hard to interpret. They [parents] are not even sure what grades mean. ‘Is C a good grade? Is D a good grade?’” — general education middle school teacher

The quoted response below, titled “At Open House,” emerged from our teacher interviews and is an example of a possible misunderstanding when English-speaking teachers are communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse parents. In response to the conversation being interpreted into Spanish, the English-speaking teacher assumed that the parent was unwilling to discuss her child’s disability. While that may be true, the parent may have simply felt uncomfortable talking about sensitive issues in a public setting such as an open house at school.

At Open House

“I’m thinking of a student I have who is having extremely severe anxiety issues, and, to the point where she almost had to be hospitalized. She [the student] kind of goes back and forth on how she’s dealing with it. At open house the other night, mom just didn’t want to hear it. There she was interpreting through the older sister and you could tell, even when she was interpreting (in Spanish), mom didn’t want to hear it. It needed to be talked about but she just didn’t want to deal with it.” — special education high school teacher

(8) Suggestions to Improve Communication.

❖ **State developed large-scale assessment materials were not “parent friendly.”**

“I think a lot of the information that the state provides about the test is not written at a level that’s easy to read.” — special education middle school teacher

“It’s not parent-friendly.” — special education middle school teacher

“No, it’s not. When teachers are looking at it and think, ‘What does this say?’ The parents who don’t look at them all of the time...are going to have a lot more trouble trying to figure it out. Then when you’ve got the language issue added in, it makes it even more difficult.” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **More timely parent information about state test accommodations would be helpful.**

“Maybe just a reminder of what accommodations are in their IEPs...stating that those will be used in testing. That could be done with the flyer about making sure that they get a good breakfast, a lot of sleep, and if they need accommodations.” — special education elementary school teacher

“Because a lot of them may forget. It might have been months since the last IEP so they are like, ‘Now what kind of accommodations?’” — special education elementary school teacher

“Give them [parents] a timeline maybe a month before, letting them know testing is coming up. Maybe like a month before...and then every week after that reminding them.” — special education elementary school teacher

II. Large-Scale Assessments. Two thematic findings emerged from the teacher interview data that further highlight differences between and across schools.

(1) State Tests.

❖ **Teachers assumed that parents of English language learners with disabilities know about statewide testing.**

“At the IEPs, you let them know whether they’re going to be taking the state test or the alternate assessment.” — special education elementary school teacher

“At the initial IEP meetings, we tried to explain a little bit more about it. For instance, we try to explain to parents the accommodations their students receive. We try to explain to them why students have to take the state and district assessments.” — special education elementary school teacher

“A lot of my parents have a child that has siblings that are also in school that are taking those assessments. So they [parents] are aware of it.” — special education elementary school teacher

“For the IEP, special education parents will know. For the ELL kids, they [parents] should know because they get tested with the [state English language development test name] and the [state test name]. And we mail all the results home. They should have an idea when we give the test and what areas are being tested and at what level they are in.” — special education middle school teacher

“Yeah, they know all that. Generally, yeah. I think that they do.” — special education middle school teacher

“They [parents] would know because we tell them.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **Other teachers believed that parents of English language learners with disabilities only had a “surface” understanding about statewide testing.**

“I think parents know in general that students take a test because at our school, we send home flyers, you know, reminding parents to make sure they have a good breakfast, they get enough sleep the night before, that they have to come to school on those days.” — special education elementary school teacher

“I think that it’s important for the parents to know why students have to take them [state tests]. Because they might not have taken these in their home country. But they don’t seem to be that familiar with why the students have to take them.” — special education elementary school teacher

“I don’t know if parents know that much about what those assessments are really testing. I think they know that we have them and the students are taking them.” — special education elementary school teacher

“I don’t want to say that they don’t understand, but they appear to not understand the depth of what is being assessed. So they don’t really ask that many questions.” — special education elementary school teacher

❖ **Teachers thought that school information was the main way in which parents of English language learners with disabilities were informed about statewide testing.**

“I don’t think any of our parents read the newspaper or anything like that. So mostly the flyers that we send home. We send home flyers and letters to let parents know and then explain a little bit at the initial IEP meetings. And at parent conferences.” — special education elementary school teacher

In response to how parents learned about statewide testing, a teacher said, *“From the schools. The information that they send home.” — special education middle school teacher*

“I couldn’t really speak to whether or not they would get it from newspapers or bulletins from school. Even out on the sign in front...it has the dates that testing is going on.” — special education elementary school teacher

❖ **Parents of English language learners with disabilities were concerned about whether their students will pass the state test.**

“One of the things in IEPs, when you are talking about the state tests, sometimes they [parents] are concerned when you tell them why they’re getting the alternate [assessment]. They appreciate that because they don’t want the child taking something where they are set up for failure. In a way, some things that they might not be able to do really. Sometimes the parents are, ‘Oh, we don’t want them to have to sit down and do this test.’ They have not gone over the curriculum.” — special education elementary school teacher

“What bad thing will happen. They [parents] are always thinking that the other shoe is going to fall for them. They are in special education, so they are overwhelmed with what’s going to happen.” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Other parents of English language learners with disabilities did not raise concerns about statewide testing.**

“If they ask any questions, it will be things like, ‘What should they eat for breakfast?’ More, I think about the care of the students’ needs as opposed to what they need to do for the test. Some parents will ask a little bit about, ‘What can I do at home?’ to help the student. It’s more to deal with how to improve their reading or their math as opposed to specifically, ‘What can I do to help my student do well on this test?’” — special education elementary school teacher

❖ **English language learners with disabilities do not participate in the state English language development test.**

“The [English language development state test name] is...only English language development kids.” — special education middle school teacher

(2) Test Accommodations.

❖ **Elementary and middle school teachers’ understanding of test accommodations varied across the school staff.**

“Accommodations would be something that might be using a certain...well, let’s go back. Modifications are more like you might change some of the surroundings, where accommodations...Wouldn’t that be something that you would be using? I don’t know.” — special education elementary school teacher

Or, another teacher said, *“If they need accommodations such as use of manipulatives, extended time, one-on-one instruction or something like that.” — special education elementary school teacher*

Yet another teacher said, *“Right, like an alternate assessment would definitely be a modification.” — special education elementary school teacher*

“General education teachers I don’t think in general know. I think they know what some of the general accommodations are, but they’re not positive what their particular students’ accommodations are.” — special education elementary school teacher

In response to the interviewer’s inquiry about small group settings or extended time to take the test, a teacher responded, *“That’s accommodation?” — special education middle school teacher*

On the other hand, another teacher responded, *“Accommodations are more like a different setting. They could take it [state test] in the resources special education class or in the general education classroom. And modifications are more like somebody reading the test to them or allowing them to use additional aids such as large print tests.” — special education middle school teacher*

“I think our IEP now makes the distinction pretty clear. That the accommodations are ways of helping their students to do better in a way that is not affecting the actual administration of the tests. It’s a different setting or a flexible schedule. Modifications are actually changing the tests. It changes the way that the test is going to be scored and how their student will do on it.” — high school special education teacher

When asked how accommodations and modifications could affect state test score reporting, a teacher said, *“It used to be that they [accommodated or modified state test scores] would not be included in the overall determination, but now I think that they are included.”* — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Teachers did not necessarily talk to parents of English language learners with disabilities about test accommodations.**

When asked if she had ever talked to parents about test accommodations, one teacher said, *“No, I haven’t. Not the ones who are both ELL and special education.”* — special education middle school teacher

When asked if she discussed test accommodations with parents of English language learners, the same teacher responded, *“Usually we don’t have any test accommodations for the ELL students.”* — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Teachers believed that parents of English language learners did not understand what test accommodations are used for.**

When asked if parents knew what test accommodations were, one teacher said, *“I would say they do not.”* — special education elementary school teacher

“Sometimes when we get to that point in the IEP, there’s been so much information. You can see their eyes glaze over.” — special education elementary school teacher

“Even at the IEP meetings when I’m explaining a little bit about the accommodations they [English language learners with disabilities] will receive, parents tend not to ask me that many questions. So I don’t know if it’s because they don’t understand what these accommodations are for, what they are, why they’re important.” — special education elementary school teacher

“I don’t get that many questions about the accommodations. I think they just know in general that when their students take these tests, they will have some special support that other students don’t get.” — special education elementary school teacher

“I doubt [if parents know]. If you told the parent, ‘I read the test, or I gave them more time,’ they would understand that. But it somehow never comes up. That conversation never really comes up.” — English language development middle school teacher

“We explain that [accommodations], but I’m not sure that they could tell you what they are....When we go through that page of the IEP that say ‘does this child qualify for test accommodations?’ then that’s when you go through that with the parent. But, that’s a

technical thing for them to understand....I don't think they would ask that question."
— special education middle school parent

❖ **Teachers treated test accommodations as logistical arrangements rather than student-centered test support.**

"We work together on scheduling. I try to come up with a list of which groups of students can take which test together because of their accommodations. I try to submit the schedule to the teachers about a week before standardized testing starts. That way we can figure out a good schedule." — special education elementary school teacher

"Actually the resource special education teachers are really good about letting us know that...this student will test with me. Or, if they don't finish, send them to me and then they can finish up depending on if they have time accommodations or not." — special education middle school teacher

"You would talk to their resource special education teacher to see what accommodations they would be making. If they're going to pull them out or if they'll be participating with the rest of the student population." — special education middle school teacher

"You're not always getting the performance that you want. So if they really don't want to be with me, they're going to perform just as well if they're somewhere else." — high school special education teacher

❖ **Teachers usually shared information about students' test accommodations with other teachers on an informal basis.**

"Teachers will seek me out. I talk to the general education teachers mostly about accommodations. A lot of general education teachers are really curious when testing comes around. They ask me, 'What about this student? There's no way they can do this.' So I try to explain the accommodations." — special education elementary school teacher

"As we cross in the hallways, we'll just mention that, 'So and so has to be pulled out for this test.'" Just a quick walk-by as you see each other. That's about it with my resource special education teacher." — English language development middle school teacher

"You would talk to their resource special education teacher if they were mainstreamed and not in a special day class." — special education middle school teacher

"Usually the students that I have, I communicate with the teachers that have them in their general education subjects." — special education middle school teacher

❖ **English language learners with disabilities only use special education accommodations when participating in statewide testing.**

“We do have accommodations for special education kids that are also English language development students. Normally the special education teacher will take care of them and they won’t test with the general education population or the resource special education teacher will take care of them.” — bilingual middle school guidance counselor

“Usually, though, if they do have accommodations, they will take the tests with me rather than in their general education classroom.” — special education middle school teacher

III. Special Education Procedures. One general category of findings emerged from teachers’ interviews that pertained specifically to the unique process of implementing IEP team procedures with families of English language learners with disabilities.

IEP team meetings.

❖ **Logistics preclude the attendance of English language experts at IEP team meetings for English language learners.**

“If we get the notice for the IEP meeting in and I can schedule it in, but a lot of times they’re scheduled during the resource special education teacher’s prep period. That’s not necessarily my prep period, so we have to get a sub for that period. Sometimes it makes it kind of difficult to get the IEP meetings.” — English language development middle school teacher

“Not always, but the majority of the time there is someone. Normally I’m there translating or another teacher that knows the English language development process [such as] what level or...if they’re going in English language development [classes]. But we always get invited.” — bilingual middle school counselor

“It’s hard enough to get interpreters at our meetings, much less somebody whose specialty is language acquisition.” — special education high school teacher

“Usually the moms are coming...quite often there are larger families with daycare issues. So usually they are only able to come during the day. Not only do I have to have coverage for myself, so somebody can cover my class. It’s hard enough to get myself covered and it’s almost impossible to get coverage for any other teacher to come out of their class and come to the meeting. That’s been a real challenge.” — special education high school teacher

- ❖ **IEP team members convened for English language learners with disabilities included an English language expert if the special education teacher was dual certified.**

“Our speech and language therapist is bilingual and trained in all ways to separate out language acquisition from disability. She is just on the IEP team if the child has speech and language services. But she is always there[at school] to consult with.” — special education elementary school teacher

“We [special education teachers with Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD) credentialing] are the ones on the IEP teams.” — special education middle school teacher

“They have a general education teacher that comes to IEPs. It may or may not be the English language development teacher.” — special education middle school teacher

- ❖ **However, general education teachers were present for IEP team meetings for English language learners with disabilities.**

“At the IEP meeting...usually the child has one regular education class which is physical education, so we have to have a regular education teacher at that meeting. It’s the law.” — special education middle school teacher

- ❖ **Middle school special education teachers perceive parents as not necessarily aware of special education procedures.**

“We’ve come into some trouble with that before about, ‘You know, if my child gets this grade on the test [state test], then he should be out of special education.’ So, we let them take most of the test the way everybody else takes it. The way the rest of the 8th grade takes it. That will pretty much tell you where they are.” — special education middle school teacher

- ❖ **Parents accepted teachers’ student-related information passively.**

“For the most part they just kind of accept the information that we’re giving out to them. Some of them would just want to know if their kids are doing the best that they could.” — special education middle school teacher

“I think they [parents] accept decisions made during IEPs with...trust that the teacher is making the best decision for the student.” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Teachers express concern about parent understanding of school-based information.**

“It would be beneficial to have a parents’ education class about what it means for your special education student.” — special education elementary school teacher

“That may be our misunderstanding from them. I mean, we explain it. We go over it. We have the interpreter go over it. We have things in Spanish. You know, we go to training so we can better serve them in this process, but sometimes I just feel like...it’s still going through someone else.” — special education middle school teacher

“So it’s hard...it’s our communication problem that we don’t speak Spanish. We really can’t know what they know. We don’t know how to ask the right questions.” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Some parents were not aware of their middle school-age children’s IEPs.**

“Sometimes they don’t understand...what an IEP is, but they’ve been doing it for several years. When they come to the middle school, I’ll say, ‘Do you have an IEP?’ They will say, ‘No.’ I’ll say, ‘Yes. This student has been in special education for five years. You should have an IEP. You know—when you sat down with the team?’ They say, ‘Oh yeah. That I do.’ Then I’ll tell them if you go anywhere else, the district has to provide these services for you. Sometimes they think that if you go to another school you don’t get those services.” — special education middle school teacher

“Like [student name] last year. It was a couple of months before mom came in and let us know that he did have an IEP. He’d been in the reading classes that is an intermixture of EOs [English only] and ELLs [English language learners].” — special education middle school teacher

IV. Native Language Issues. Thematic findings that highlight native language issues are organized according to three general areas.

(1) Parent Involvement.

❖ **Parents of middle school aged English language learners with disabilities shared their native culture at school infrequently.**

When asked if parents shared about their culture at school, one teacher indicated, *“Not so much that I have noticed.” — special education elementary school teacher*

“We’ve had multicultural fairs. They have different booths representing different ethnicities and cultures and it isn’t necessarily just the food. They have dance...and different native dress. So it’s probably pretty superficial that way culturally.” — special education elementary school teacher

“There is that activity where parents come in and do a multicultural thing for [group]... that is like a PTA.” — special education middle school teacher

“I wish parents could share their culture with the school more.” — special education middle school teacher

(2) Family background information.

❖ **Teachers did not receive family background information either easily or in a timely way.**

“That [family background information] is usually in an evaluation that we receive when they [English language learners with disabilities] are given a psychological evaluation when they first come in.” — special education elementary school teacher

“I don’t think that I do. It would be helpful if I knew a lit bit more. I probably know a little more about the student because I have access to the records so I can see where they were born, how long they have been in the U.S. But in terms of their family backgrounds, I don’t know that much.” — special education elementary school teacher

“Our school psychologist probably knows a little bit more than the general education teacher because for assessments they either interview the parent or call home. I think they have more access to the home.” — special education elementary school teacher

“I wish it would be available right away when the kids come in, and that would make things easier.” — special education middle school teacher

“It takes a while for them [parents] to share with us. We try not to push that, [and] to let them share with us if they want to.” — special education middle school teacher

“That information doesn’t come in until we actually ask [for it] from the counselor.” — special education middle school teacher

“There’s a thin line between privacy and [family] information.” — special education middle school teacher

“Probably not as much as we need.” — special education high school teacher

“In terms of any cultural background or parental backgrounds, the only way we can get that is to fish for it ourselves.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **Teachers used two sources—schools and families—to acquire information about family’s native culture.**

“Something that I try to do in IEP meetings when I’m telling them about my goals for my students is to explain my thinking. The reason I have this goal for this student is because I value this or in this society in school you have to be able to do this. And then I try to ask them, ‘Is this different from what you value?’ That’s one of the ways in which I’ve been trying to figure out how their culture is different than mine, or than mainstream American society.” — special education elementary school teacher

“The only time I remember was the writing test for 4th graders in March. One of the things that parents had to fill out was their level of education. So that actually I didn’t know what level of education parents had. So that was the first time with some of my students where I actually knew, ‘Oh, your parents didn’t graduate from high school. Or they just finished 4th grade.’” — special education elementary school teacher

“Basically, we know a lot about each one of our students because we ask and we find out and we call and we check with other people.” — special education middle school teacher

“I asked them [students], so I basically get the information that they are willing to give to me. At the beginning of the year, I have them fill out where they were born, what language is spoken at home, from what country they are from.” — English language development middle school teacher

“Cumulative files have the most information.” — general education middle school teacher

“The teachers know that they can always go check cumulative files, but that can be a very time consuming process to go check each individual student’s cume file.” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Special education teachers are perceived as knowing more family background information for English language learners with disabilities.**

“Probably we know it [family background information]. I think that others would probably have access to it initially, but since we see them every day, look through their IEPs, and kind of know them.” — special education elementary school teacher

“That contact...to learn new things that are happening to them in their lives. We have some that mainstream out, but we are pretty much the liaison.” — special education elementary school teacher

“Probably the special education and resource special education [would know] because they work with the students a lot more and with the parents a lot more.” — special education middle school teacher

“The English language development teacher—levels 1 and 2—because they’re in the classroom two periods in one day. They really get to know the kids, the background, special needs, and [how to] work with them....They have only two teachers, so one teacher will teach history and English and the other teacher will teach science and math. It’s all English language development students and it’s less than 20 students....English language development [level] 3 would be just one period with one teacher.” — special education middle school teacher

On rare occasion in our interview process, a teacher demonstrated unique understandings for cultures other than his or her own native culture. The following narrative demonstrates this type of respect when teaching in multi-cultural settings.

Specific Differences

“I try and be really culturally aware of all of my students, but it helps that I’m really fascinated by all sorts of other cultures. My grandparents lived in Mexico for ten years, which helps with my Mexican-American students. Although I actually have a lot of Spanish-speaking students whose families are not from Mexico. I try to be really aware of that distinction because it really bothers them if people call them Mexicans.” — high school special education teacher

(3) Sharing native cultures.

❖ **Cross-cultural activities at school were curriculum-driven and teacher dependent.**

“I think it depends on the individual teachers and I think sometimes with the social studies classes it might be a little bit easier because that’s built into what they do. It’s not part of our pacing charts and things like for other classes.” — bilingual guidance middle school counselor

“For me, I’m in the community. One of the reasons I became a counselor was to help my community succeed. In regards to that I’m always sharing difference music and culture. We have a Latino club here on campus so that our kids can be aware of what’s going

on. They know the history behind that. We also have an Asian culture club and also an African American club. Everyone, it's not only for Latinos, everyone can join. There's different mixes in the groups.” — bilingual guidance middle school counselor

“We also had a cultural fair last year...for different cultures. Our [group's name] invited parents to come in. We had a big food fair where everyone brought in food. So the whole community came in.” — bilingual guidance middle school counselor

“I'll have discussions about certain things in class to find out about the culture, but I think you're pretty much on your own.” — general education middle school teacher

“If I were to teach something in English class, I would say what idioms do you have in your culture...but that's very superficial kind of information.” — general education middle school teacher

“I think in the 6th grade curriculum it helps because we do talk about culture at the beginning of the year when we do a culture oral report. They [students] had to tell everybody about it and everybody had to do it.” — English language development middle school teacher

“It depends on the teacher.” — special education high school teacher

“I think on a limited basis they are able to share their culture...particularly within the English language learning classes.” — special education high school teacher

“We have an intercultural fair in which they are able to do things like that.” — special education high school teacher

Rival Finding—*“You know, sometimes that [multi-cultural sharing] causes problems with other groups. That's why we try to keep it neutral.” — special education high school teacher*

❖ **Student sharing about their native culture was activity dependent.**

“I've noticed a lot of my students are hesitant to talk about the different things that go on in their house. Yesterday we were talking about culture and your background and how it affects you values. You could hear crickets chirping. There was no discussion.” — English language development middle school teacher

“They'll talk about the celebrations, but they don't necessarily talk about the beliefs or their family practices.” — English language development middle school teacher

Differences within Schools

Our content analysis of teacher interview data also yielded unique differences in teacher responses within the middle school and the high school.

Middle School

According to special education teachers at the middle school:

- ❖ **Parents of English language learners with disabilities at the middle school have limited knowledge about large-scale assessment programs.**

“They [parents] might know that their children are testing, but for what...what that means?” — general education special education teacher

“I would say not. They [parents] have things mailed to the house. And the school gives handouts...I can tell my students [to] tell me when they get forms and printouts of the results if they can’t interpret any of that [test results].” — general education middle school teacher

“I’ve even had kids come to me with forms, and go, ‘My parents got this and they don’t know what it is. Can you tell me what it is?’” — English language development middle school teacher

Yet, general educators and English language development teachers indicated:

- ❖ **Parents of English language learners with disabilities at the middle school were well aware of statewide testing.**

“Unless we’re getting them from another country in 6th grade, the parents are aware of the testing because they [students] have been doing it [statewide testing] for five or six years.” — special education middle school teachers

On another line of interview questioning, results from special educators at the middle school were:

- ❖ **Special education teachers at the middle school tended to contact parents of English language learners with disabilities with both positive and negative school issues.**

“Behavior, tardies. If the child has been particularly good, and they [students] want me to call their parents, then I’ll call and say, ‘They’ve been really good today.’” — special education middle school teacher

“Or school materials. They’re not coming in with school materials. And reminders for IEP meetings. School events.” — special education middle school teacher

However, results from general educators were:

❖ **General education teachers at the middle school tended to contact parents of English language learners with disabilities only regarding school problems.**

“Unless we [teachers] have a specific concern, behavior, concern, grade...” — general education middle school teacher

“Honestly, most teachers tend to call more when there’s a problem. That’s something they [teachers] can work for here. You know, we could do both. How would you like to get a phone call, ‘Boy, your kid’s doing great.’” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Special education teachers in the middle school communicated with parents of English language learners with disabilities more than general education teachers.**

“Especially if they [ELLs with disabilities] are in ‘resource special education,’ I know from my experience last year that I went to a lot of IEPs. Sometimes that was the first time I met the parents. So it usually would be the resource special education teacher that would contact the parent most often.” — English language development middle school teacher

“Some depends upon the teacher. I know in special education, we need to talk with them because we have...the big meeting every year to update the goals and objectives. At other times we have meetings if students are having particular problems during the year. But I think most of our teachers work with the parents.” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Eighth grade special education teachers were the only teachers who mentioned future high stakes testing.**

“I usually deal with 8th grade, and that [high stakes testing] is one of the things I really spend a lot of time with. After this year, they will be expected to do some things to get a diploma and they are not going to get a diploma if not. In 9th and 10th grade, they [school staff] are going to be deciding what track they are going on. Dealing with 8th

grade, it's a really big issue for them [parents] to understand that there is an exit exam.”
— *special education middle school teacher*

High School

- ❖ **Prior to this school year, parents typically did not initiate contact with high school teachers.**

“They [parents] never contact me.” — special education high school teacher

“I always contact them [parents].” — special education high school teacher

Rival Finding—*“I would agree [that parents do not contact me], but this year particularly with a couple of my ELL students whose parents have made a strong effort, even though they're not English-speaking, to contact me.” — special education high school teacher*

Differences across Schools

Differences across the schools also emerged across the schools that show how these schools are unique entities within this case study. For instance, the only teachers who indicated sending handwritten notes home were elementary special education teachers. Translated written communication for parents of English language learners with disabilities from the middle and high schools tended to be sent out in mass from either the school or district office.

- ❖ **Some elementary special education teachers communicated with parents of English language learners in handwritten notes that are translated and interpreted in Spanish.**
- “We keep a communication log. I have an aide who writes and speaks Spanish. She'll usually write in the kind of information I need to give the parent, and the parent will write back in Spanish. Then my aide will interpret what she [parent] said.” — special education elementary school teacher*
- ❖ **Middle school special education teachers provided test accommodations without making student-centered IEP team decisions.**

“Most of the time I don't get any accommodations because they [students] don't. It [state test administration] is automatically a small setting [special education classroom]. But, it's not on their IEP.” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Parents of English language learners with disabilities at the middle school seemed unwilling to communicate with teachers.**

“Their [parents] willingness to want to talk to us. They don’t even want...it’s like they’re afraid to come to school sometimes.” — special education middle school teacher

“Sometimes they [parents] are just not available...they won’t return our calls. There seems to be no feedback coming from them.” — special education middle school teacher

❖ **Most parents at the middle school did not readily come to school on either a formal or informal basis.**

“First, that parents would come to school.” — special education middle school teacher

“I think they really shy away from even coming here [school].” — special education middle school teacher

“I’ve had some parents also at our open houses say that they felt a little intimidated to be in the school, and some might not even show up because of that.” — general education middle school teacher

“I think that back-to-school night is the perfect way to let parents know [school information], but only a third of parents—if that—show up. The older they [students] get, the less parents you get.” — English language development middle school teacher

❖ **At the high school, the assignment of bilingual staff to special education programs determined the mode of teacher-parent contact.**

“I usually have to have some sort of [interpreter] scheduled before, so talking over the phone is not usually workable.” — special education high school teacher

“For me...it’s been over the phone because I have had a Spanish-speaking paraeducator.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **According to teachers, parents of English language learners with disabilities at the high school expressed concerns about the state’s graduation exam.**

“I found actually that my parents are really aware of it [state test] and it bothers them.” — special education high school teacher

In response to the interviewer asking, “Are they concerned that their children might not be passing the tests, or that their children should be included?”, a teacher responded, “Both.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **At the high school, teacher collaboration about statewide testing is infrequent and focused on the use of test accommodations.**

“I have [collaborated] in the past with ELL teachers whose students I wanted to pull out to take the testing with me. We did a different model then for resource [special education instruction]. It’s a little different now so I haven’t recently. But I did in the past.” — special education high school teacher

“Whatever type of interaction I have in regards to this would be with the other ED [emotional disability] teacher. So very little.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **At the high school, English language learners with disabilities decide a few weeks prior to the test administration whether to use test accommodations or not when taking the state test.**

“Because we have tests coming up in two weeks, all of my kids qualify through their IEP for taking it in a smaller environment with me. But I’m canvassing them right now to find out which ones of them want to take advantage of that.... You’re not always getting the performance that you want. So if they really don’t want to be with me, they’re going to perform just as well if they’re somewhere else.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **Some high school students perceived themselves as “different” when using test accommodations for the high school graduation exam.**

A special education teacher commented, “If they’re angry about being there and not taking it with everyone else...” The interviewer followed up by saying, “They would be angry because they’re seen as different?” to which the teacher responded, “Yes.” — special education high school teacher

“It really depends on a lot of factors [like] maturity. Some kids really want to take advantage of being with me and some kids don’t.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **High school special education teachers seemed confused by the recent changes in the state’s high school exit exam.**

“I think that the 11th and 12th graders have to pass this testing with 30% or above. I think that is what it is.” — special education high school teacher

“I’m not sure. I’m not familiar with that [passing criteria]. But, they changed the testing so much in the past couple of years.” — special education high school teacher

“Eleventh and 12th graders have been exempt from the state test for some type of court decision. So as of right now, it’s 9th and 10th graders and next year it will be everyone.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **Teachers described too many failures on the state’s high school exit exam as an instructional issue.**

“Apparently the teachers hadn’t been prepared enough to support our 11th and 12th graders. The parents were distressed that the kids were not being prepared. That’s why they made the 11th and 12th graders exempt [the first year]. The teachers will have more time to prepare the 9th and 10th graders for the exams.” — special education high school teacher

“Students before didn’t have to pass a test to graduate from high school. Particularly the math test, there were high rates of failure the first time around. How many times did they have to take it? Seven or so?” — special education high school teacher

“Because we went to that math institute where we were supposed to be preparing to teach very high math. Secondary algebra. Very unfair. That’s the way it is.” — special education high school teacher

“I think it [high math] will be overturned.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **Teachers report that parents do not like alternatives to a high school diploma if children do not pass the high school exit exam.**

“The only thing that we can do is have them on a certificate of completion track. They won’t get a diploma, but they will get a certificate that states that they finished high school. Parents don’t like that. I’ve been told not to ... We don’t encourage that.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **High school teachers report that parents of English language learners with disabilities varied in their understanding of test accommodations.**

“Via the IEP meetings they should know...some do and some don’t.” — special education high school teacher

“The testing accommodations and modifications are very straightforward. I think that the parents can see very clearly the benefits of their child getting accommodations. For

example, I always hear, “Will my child be able to use a calculator?” — special education high school teacher

“Sometimes it seems like they are more concerned about that [test accommodations] than they are about any other question on the IEP.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **High school teachers think that IEPs are also confusing for English speaking parents.**

“Even if you are a total English speaker and you’re going through the IEP, some of it can be... Why are we going over this? What does this mean?” — special education high school teacher

❖ **The lack of school-wide cross-cultural experiences may be due to special education instructional setting.**

“On a school-wide basis...not really. At least not to my experience, but then again...I’m ED (emotional disability) and we’re kind of back off.” — special education high school teacher

❖ **Availability of family background information may be driven by the family’s legal status in the U.S.**

“A lot of times, particularly if you are dealing with a family who is here without the documents...I have a student whose mother is very, very secretive. She doesn’t even like coming to the school for that reason.” — special education high school teacher

District and School Administrators. An assistant superintendent of special education and a program specialist of special education/English language learners were interviewed to garner district level perspectives on inclusive large-scale assessment and accountability programs for English language learners with disabilities. To understand administrative views from the school perspective, we also interviewed principals at each school site. It should be noted though that our findings from the district level administrators and elementary principal are fleshed out more fully because data collection resources allowed for more in depth interviewing. Interpreting interview results from the middle and high school perspective should be done with caution due to limited interview data. The following thematic findings point to features of this district and four of its schools where inclusive large-scale assessment and accountability programs are a priority. Our findings are organized by grand themes each of which is followed by explanatory subthemes.

The interview opened with questions about these district and school administrators' views of inclusive large-scale assessment and accountability programs.

Grand Theme 1: At the administrative level of special education, a “systems approach to leadership” has been adopted to foster the inclusion of all students in large-scale assessments.

Since the high rate of participation in statewide testing can be difficult to achieve (Elliott, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1996), we specifically asked the assistant superintendent of special education what factors contributed to the participation rate in this district. Citing that “one factor was not most important,” the assistant superintendent indicated that large-scale assessment inclusiveness was grounded in “a systemic approach to [school] change.... You can’t just go at the target. You’ve got to go underneath it, around it, behind it, below it so it is a systemic approach.... My approach to everything is systemic.”

❖ **Every student participates in large-scale assessments in this school district.**

All district and school level personnel interviewed for this case study mirrored a mandated, albeit assumed, policy of including all students in statewide testing. This practice incorporated any subgroups of students with disabilities such as those whose native language is not English. A story describing initial planning with the assistant superintendent of special education demonstrates this district mandate.

You won’t find any!

One of the original research questions for this case study addressed those English language learners with disabilities who did not participate in statewide testing. In discussing this part of our research with the assistant superintendent of special education, her immediate response was, “You won’t find any! All of our students are tested. I mean—every single student!” We were asked to develop a different research question, which we did.

❖ **Inclusive large-scale assessment programming is grounded in the delivery of high-quality instruction.**

Believing that improved student academic outcomes reflected in improved accountability outcomes begins by upgrading the delivery of standards-based instruction, all staff development is organized and delivered by the Office of Curriculum and Development. In doing so, the responsibility for inclusive accountability is shared across the district rather than resting solely in the office of special education or within individual schools. Testing all students becomes an issue

for all teachers—not just special education teachers. The assistant superintendent explained, “It [inclusive accountability] is founded in good instruction... You have to understand that this is not a special education-drive issue. It is comes from the Office of Curriculum and Development. It’s really professional development.”

❖ **All educational staff “heard” the inclusive accountability message.**

Staff development targets a variety of stakeholders including principals in a variety of settings such as departmental meetings at the school site or administrative meetings that pull principals together from across the district. This district-wide endeavor rolls out the policy intent into daily educational practice within all schools. While information may be adjusted for the unique differences among groups of educators, the overall message of inclusiveness is always retained. According to the assistant superintendent, “It’s professional development from the Office of Curriculum and Instruction to the school site, the principals’ meetings, and our special education department meetings. It’s not just one [group]. You have to hit it at every angle.” Further, she added, “It’s definitely working with special education teachers to understand the concept around ‘inclusive assessment and accommodations.’ Once they understand it, then they can talk to other [staff members] in the IEP process about it.”

When responding to how she had learned that all students were to be included in statewide testing, the program specialist reflected the systemic approach to information flow within the district. “I guess it comes down the chain of command from the assistant superintendents to the principals. Then in special education, it comes through the mechanism of the administrator for teaching and learning to the team leaders who are assigned to specific sites. It’s explained at monthly meetings with department heads and lead teachers...who convey the information to people at their sites.” School-based administrators described this flow of information in a similar fashion reflecting the understanding that the message was to be emphasized continually with their staff members.

❖ **Teaching staff receive direct experience with expected best practices.**

When district level administrators target desired teaching practices, staff development activities and materials are developed to provide “hands on” experience that support changes in current procedures. For instance, based on a recently published assessment textbook (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 2002), “there are a couple of checklists that teachers can use for [selecting] accommodations. Teachers have been provided with those and used them in doing case study reviews [during professional development].” The assistant superintendent then explained that these checklists were translated into changes in students’ IEP forms.

❖ **District administrators champion accountability-driven systemic changes.**

Described as the “main thing that we’ve changed,” specific teacher practices were modified to better support high-quality decision making about how students with disabilities, including English language learners with disabilities, could demonstrate the best state test performance possible. Changes are internally consistent with other special education components in that key aspects of staff development are embedded in special education teachers’ practices. To that end, the assistant superintendent said, “I changed the entire IEP pages for accommodations to reflect six boxes [derived from accommodation-related staff development content]. Teachers are ‘forced’ through the IEP process to identify instructional accommodations according to those ‘six boxes’...for instructional accommodations, classroom assessment accommodations, and state and district assessment accommodations.”

❖ **Administrative staff was accountable for expected professional attitudes, attributes, and actions.**

While this leadership approach complicated administrators’ day to day work load, each principal was expected to work outside of their office daily. Direct contact with staff and students was built into their job description. The assistant superintendent assumed the same role in that, “I’m in the schools every morning between 7:30 A.M. and 11:30 A.M. I go out and teach and read to the kids, and model, and visit with the principals, and problem solve and troubleshoot...Every administrator in the central office should be required to be out in the schools. I don’t care if you’re a budget person or whatever. It’s really, really critical for people who are movers and shakers and changers—who are really about accountability—to be out...That’s the culture in our district. Principals are told they need to be in the classrooms two to three hours out their day. We [district administrators] model that by being out [in the schools].”

We found this practice to be true throughout our data collection process in the individual schools. Building principals were rarely in their offices, but rather seen in classrooms or hallways interacting with students, staff, and parents. In fact, we found principals in their offices only before and after school hours or for meetings with parents or students that required a confidential setting. The program specialist also indicated that she “keeps her hand in there with the teachers because I find that that really helps me in my job...They know me. Then when something comes down through the pipeline from me, they tend to pay attention to it.” This personal contact with the teaching staff is further exemplified by the following story.

That Personal Touch

“I had a teacher at the high school tell me last week that because of something little that I done [sic] with her that I had totally forgotten about, that ‘when something comes from you—I don’t throw it in the trash. I sit there and read it because it means that it’s

going to make sense.’ So I thought...well, I don’t have that kind of relationship with all the teachers in the field. But, I try to do that and I also try to help them out when they’re stuck on a student. When they are encountering obstacles, I like to go out and see the kids and talk with the teachers because it really gives me a feel for what’s going on....It helps me to understand why information might get lost coming from us, which...tends to be a one way flow of communication. It needs to be much more reciprocal. I think that we need to do a lot more listening.”

❖ **Each administrator has unique professional skills and experiences that support high-quality educational leadership.**

Both of the district level professionals bring a wealth of school and community experiences to the administrative aspects of providing special education services to English language learners and their families. The assistant superintendent of special education had a high-level of special education experience at the local, state, and national level of American education. In addition, she is an author of multiple large-scale assessment books and reports as well as having provided state-level technical assistance in this area. Just as unique in experience, the program specialist in special education/English language learners was a bilingual speaker of English and Spanish with extensive educational experiences that cross general education, special education, English language learning, and educational leadership. “I was in general education for ten years...that I think was probably the single most valuable thing that prepared me to work in special education....Just understanding the life of the classroom and the pressures on the teachers [helps to] establish contacts that way.”

Another portion of the face-to-face interview with district and school administrators addressed the inherent challenges to providing special education services for English language learners identified with a disability.

Grand Theme 2—Administrators identify areas to improve their district’s large-scale assessment and accountability programs.

Even though this district has made significant strides in developing inclusive statewide testing programs that are used for accountability purposes, their focus remains on continuing to improve student outcomes across all of the schools in their district.

❖ **The most challenging issue in this school district is to ensure access to grade-level, standards-based instruction for English language learners with disabilities.**

The assistant superintendent of special education indicated that she “didn’t think that we’re where we need to be right now. I think the biggest challenge is making sure the kids have access

to the curriculum they need in order to show what they know and can do...If we're looking at accountability practices based on test scores, we have to make sure that the kids are first being given access to good instruction that addresses their language needs."

❖ **District personnel identified problems in the flow of information through the schools.**

Identifying the teachers as the last recipients of information shared from the district officers, the program specialist said, "We're finding that a lot of information gets lost in...the conveyance from the department head/lead teacher meeting over to the actual people in the trenches at the sites. Further, she offered reasons that this break in the chain of communication was happening. "In the press for time, just the frantic day-to-day trying to run the program, it's hard for some of them to organize meetings to get the information out in an orderly fashion. Or to do the kind of follow up where, if so-and-so was out at the bus taking care of students and missed the meeting..." Suggesting that teachers are not necessarily expected to think systemically as administrators are, the program specialist said, "Lead teachers and department heads are chosen by their peers, but that doesn't necessarily give them the ability to think more like an administrator. They are used to taking care of kids, but not taking care of each other." In elaborating further, she suggested that "teachers do not necessarily think innately...about scheduling meetings and presenting information in a way that is user friendly."

❖ **Steps are being taken to improve the flow of information through the schools.**

After acknowledging the break down in communication to teachers in the schools, the program specialist indicated that "we worked with lead teacher and the department heads...to get some important information out. We brought them together and talked about the content of the message. Then we worked with them a little bit on how to present that. It's almost like you have to think about the content. That's step 1 and then step 2 is how do I relay this content so that it makes an impact."

To reinforce what is presented verbally, teachers also receive multiple district newsletters that are sent out from the director's office reiterating the information in a written format for future reference. One newsletter in particular is prepared by the office of the assistant superintendent of special education that is more of "a communication piece with general education than specifically transmitting information to special education people."

❖ **Increased collaboration with general education teachers is essential to improving special education student outcomes.**

In addressing how student outcomes could be improved, the program specialist indicated that, “If most of our kids [students with disabilities] are going to be saved by general education teachers who have resources at their schools and are well backed up by people with know-how in particular areas.” She went on to indicate that, “I don’t see general education teachers like I would like to.”

Another overarching theme that emerged from the district interviews concerned linguistically diverse parents of English language learners with disabilities.

Grand Theme 3—District and school administrators interact with parents of English language learners with disabilities at school.

The assistant superintendent of special education commented that, “The superintendent has parent forums on a monthly basis that we [district staff] attend. They revolve around different things...especially for special education...it’s about compliance.” There were a variety of types of meetings from parent forums to parent-teacher association meetings either with or without a preset agenda. Native language interpreters are provided as needed. The bilingual elementary principal often speaks Spanish when interacting with Spanish-speaking parents.

❖ Culturally and linguistically diverse parents did not typically raise issues at parent meetings in this district.

For the most part, linguistically diverse parents in attendance at monthly parent meetings tended to receive information passively without comments or questions. The assistant superintendent of special education did comment though, “The issue of accommodations is coming out more. Parents of English language learners [without disabilities] are now starting to rattle about high school classroom teachers specifically not providing accommodations for classroom assessments. Special education teachers are, resource room teachers are, but the general education teachers are not.” There were no particular issues identified with parents of English language learners with disabilities although the assistant superintendent of special education said, “I assume it’s coming.”

❖ Special education content for parent meetings tended to focus on compliance issues.

When parent meetings had preset agendas that were developed by district staff, “typically any kind of parent meeting that you have, especially for special education, is not about large-scale assessment and accommodations. It’s about compliance.” Her comments further described the perspectives and priorities that separate district administrators from other educators and parents. “When you get into a special education world like I’m in right, accommodations and account-

ability are huge. That's the driving force behind all that I do. But it's 'a blip on the radar screen' for principals, teachers, and parents."

❖ **Parents of English language learners with disabilities have limited knowledge about statewide testing.**

In responding to the interview questions, the assistant superintendent described patterns of group behavior and perceptions that were consistent with her understanding of parent perspectives and priorities. When asked is she thought that linguistically diverse parents knew much about statewide testing, she responded, "Probably not. They may know that there are testing windows and they that there are testing times, but I would say that most don't know the constructs that are being measured. They just know that is it a district test."

Grand theme 4—District and school administrators have daily contact with teachers and principals in the schools.

Believing that "every administrator in the central office should be required to be out in the schools," the assistant superintendent of special education begins every school day in the schools. Commenting further, "I don't care if you're a budget person or whatever. It is really, really critical for people who are movers and shakers and changers—who are really about accountability—to model that by being out [in the schools]."

❖ **District administrators model accountability to school staff by visiting schools every morning.**

Every school day between 7:30 A.M. and 11:30 A.M., the assistant superintendent of special education is visiting classrooms. "I go out and teach and read to kids, and model, and visit with the principals, and problem solve and troubleshoot." Describing this approach to leadership as "the culture in our district, principals are also told they need to be in the classrooms two to three hours out of their day. We [district administrators] model that by being out."

❖ **Daily visits to classrooms provide district and school administrators critical information about the educational process that they are leading.**

By directly observing teaching in process, one can "see what's going on. You see who is and who doesn't." It is a way to "always have your finger on the pulse." While time spent out in the schools compromises the time that the assistant superintendent can focus on office work as evidenced by, "It would be a lot easier to stay in my office all day. But you can't do systemic change and you can't hold yourself and other people accountable if you sit in your office."

Grand theme 5—District and school administrators openly addressed family and student cultural issues.

❖ **The superintendent of special education understands linguistically diverse parents at the group level.**

When asked if she was aware of specific issues that linguistically diverse parents raised about statewide assessments, the assistant superintendent’s response was consistent with her systemic view of educational leadership. Acknowledging no awareness of parent issues about state tests, she stated, “It goes back to my position and what I’m in charge of. I don’t go to IEP meetings, so I’m not at the level.” In other words, as “a systemic person,” she was aware of patterns at the group level concerning families in her school district, although she did not know families at an individual level. Yet, while thinking systemically, she did understand individuals within specific home language groups as evidenced by, “I also look at Spanish families different than Vietnamese families who are different because the culture is different. You start with the group, but it always boils down to individuals.”

❖ **District administrators understood some family cultural issues as experiential.**

In addressing the reality of cultural bias in state test items, the assistant superintendent discussed what is sometimes called a cultural bias as often being an experiential issue. For instance, she did comment that “you can pick up any test at any time and find issues” for most children... “[not just for] kids coming from poverty backgrounds. We have kids here who live six blocks from the ocean. They’re in 5th, 6th, and 7th grade and have never been to the ocean.” Further, and by qualifying that she did not have state-level information about how the state test was reviewed for cultural bias, she stated that, “Depending on the district that you are working in, you’re going to find that there’s stuff in any assessment that may be culturally inappropriate. If there’s a word problem or a reading comprehension problem about camp, as in going on a camping trip—that freaks out some of our second language learners because they came from [refugee] camps.”

❖ **Parents of English language learners do not necessarily “rock the boat,” per se, by raising controversial issues.**

Generally speaking, the families that the assistant superintendent interacts with are monolingual and are “just so happy to be here.” Because of that, “They aren’t going to rock the boat, per se, which is very frustrating. We are trying to figure out a way to get around that.” One way in which the district is trying to elicit more feedback from this subgroup of parents, “We’ve started tacking them on to what’s called the District Parent Group for English language adults to start getting those parents [of English language learners with disabilities] involved in special education issues.”

❖ **Generally speaking, district and school administrators are pleased with the use of interpreters in their school district.**

In terms of communicating with monolingual parents whose native language is not English, the assistant superintendent reported that there were no issues in obtaining an interpreter for district level meetings. “We have fabulous interpreters. The biggest frustration is...people who say at the last minute, ‘I forgot to get an interpreter.’ We have community workers who are bilingual and if I need somebody at the last minute, we will have those folks step in and interpret.” For those languages that were less prevalent in the district, “We have them [interpreters]. You might have to work a little harder.” But interpreting for the less commonly spoken languages was always possible.

Discussion

In order to discern the useful information that emerged from these findings, we compared school level and sample subgroup results for a discussion that concludes this report. By the nature of the case study research design for this project, our findings cannot be directly generalized to other school sites, but do point to noticeable school characteristics, policies, and procedures that are important considerations for policymakers, administrators, and practitioners who strive to better include English language learners with disabilities in states’ large-scale assessment and accountability programs. We have identified seven such important considerations.

➤ **This school district has local assessment policy mandating fully inclusive testing practices.**

From the office of the assistant superintendent of special education through the practitioners in the classrooms, we heard one consistent message regarding the need to include English language learners with disabilities in statewide testing. The large-scale assessment policy appears to be understood and implemented consistently throughout the district. Leaders in this school district described a systemic approach to disseminating policy information. From our cross sectional look at large-scale assessment practices in this district, accurate policy interpretation and implementation seems to have permeated all components of the school system both within and across the various schools in which we collected data.

➤ **The expectation to fully include English language learners with disabilities in state and district testing is widely disseminated in multiple formats throughout individual schools.**

Administrators in both the schools and the district provided multiple forms of communication, from specific teacher training sessions to monthly e-newsletters to weekly verbal reminders,

highlighting the importance of full participation in state testing. Students pointed out that even the signs in front of the school buildings announced the test dates.

➤ **Interpretations of statewide test data are passed through a chain of command within the school district on a consistent basis.**

As statewide test data are analyzed and interpreted, information filters through the school system in a logical and predictable manner. This information system is a written action plan that is implemented as originally decided. In passing along statewide test results, school leaders are allowed adequate time to digest the results prior to distribution to the public media. Information that could potentially impact public opinion about any one school is handled professionally to avoid undue embarrassment or alarm. These data, while sometimes troubling, are intended to improve instructional delivery and thus, student outcomes.

➤ **Accountability practices are in place to ensure fully inclusive large-scale assessments.**

While acknowledging the extensive strain of completing a daily schedule that leaders have in place in this district, their consistent daily contact with practitioners, students, and parents provides the opportunity to follow up any issues arising from assessment policy mandates. Policy interpretation is clarified, issues requiring administrative problem solving can be handled more efficiently, and leaders have first-hand knowledge about instructional delivery that provides the starting place for improving assessment and accountability outcomes. In other words, this district not only “talks” about assessing all students, but leaders “walk their talk,” so to speak.

➤ **Multiple stakeholder groups understand the importance of full participation in statewide testing by English language learners with disabilities.**

Even those closest to the students who may have had first hand experience with student concerns about statewide testing appreciated the need for students to participate in standards-based testing. This was evident in parents’ attempts to adequately prepare their children for test day as guided by school flyers sent home and teachers’ personal requests. Or, high school age students stressing the need to pass a high stakes test in order to graduate. No participant interviewed for this research study voiced any resistance to including English language learners with disabilities in statewide testing, save one family whose child had severe physical and cognitive disabilities. In this case, the parent did not seem to understand the connection between an alternate assessment and reporting that test data with the entire school test performance. The necessary next step for this district albeit many school districts is to begin articulating the intent of an alternate assessment program for including all students in accountability programs.

- **All stakeholder groups comprehend the use of test accommodations during state-wide testing.**

For the most part, all administrators, teachers, parents, and students who participated in our case study understand the use of accommodations during testing. While there were varying levels of technical knowledge, participants recognized the term, could identify which accommodations were in place on students' IEPs, and indicated an awareness of the general purpose of accommodating tests. Even though a language barrier was evident throughout our data collection activities with parents of English language learners with disabilities, this sample subgroup—again, for the most part—were familiar with test accommodations. A noteworthy finding that may apply to other home language groups is the difficulty of interpreting and translating “accommodation” to Spanish. Instead of having one Spanish word that can be used synonymously with this U.S. school practice, it was necessary to describe the general concept and process of accommodating tests. This finding points to the need for educators and policymakers to take extreme care when communicating across languages to ensure that appropriate messages are received and legal mandates are properly met. Our case study results indicated that parent-teacher communication may not always be well understood even with the use of a bilingual interpreter and translated materials.

- **Even though the level of parental involvement at school decreased as students grew older, parents still appreciated the importance of large-scale assessments.**

As would be expected, parents of English language learners with disabilities whose children were in elementary school tended to communicate more frequently with teachers at school. They attended school functions more regularly than parents of students in middle and high school as well as appearing to have more detailed information about their child's academic performance at school. Yet, parents from all three school levels did speak to the importance of their students' inclusion in statewide testing. While possibly not knowing the exact purpose of these tests, parents of students in elementary, middle, and high school alike were aware of the academic areas tested and the importance of a passing performance.

- **Test data for English language learners with disabilities is not disaggregated as separate subgroup performance results.**

No federal or state mandates, including NCLB, 2001, require school districts to disaggregate large-scale assessment performance and participation data by the discrete group of English language learners with disabilities. The fact that this school district does not do so is not unusual across U.S. schools. For best student outcomes, it would be helpful for all schools to consider

disaggregating test data for English language learners with disabilities as a separate subgroup. Additionally, for use in school improvement planning, it would be beneficial to disaggregate large-scale assessment data for English language learners with disabilities by disability category and home language group.

- **Disseminating large-scale assessment information at the school level is needed on an on-going basis.**

There was a general overall understanding for both the purpose and the procedures in the implementation of statewide testing across all sample subgroups. We did uncover isolated instances of misinformed practitioners. This was particularly true regarding teacher information about test accommodations. Even though testing issues were continually addressed through multiple means to improve accommodated testing, there were still some teachers who did not fully understand the purpose or how to best provide test accommodations for English language learners with disabilities. Because of this, it is even more imperative for all school administrators to critically re-think how test accommodation information is presented to their teachers and how the appropriate use of test accommodations can be ensured.

Concluding Remarks

This report is a first step toward describing the participation of English language learners with disabilities in statewide testing at one point in time for one large, urban school. Yet, much remains to be learned about how to best include these students in states' standards-based assessments and accountability programs. Just as importantly, research has only begun to demonstrate how these students perform and whether they can fully show what they actually know and can do.

It is critical for future research to begin teasing apart the influence of critical, confounding variables such as the variety of cultural and linguistic differences across home language groups, the length of time families have been in the U.S. and students have been in U.S. schools, previous educational experiences including how disability issues were addressed in native countries, educational backgrounds of parents and other family members, various cultural interpretations of disability issues and the affects on student academic performance, and finally—but not at all least importantly—the interaction of disability effects and various levels of English language proficiency as an effect on student large-scale assessment performance. Another important challenge is to understand how students with a variety of disabilities and levels of English language

proficiency can best be accommodated during testing so that test data are both valid indicators of students' standards-based progress and useable for school improvement planning purposes.

With an accruing foundation of solid research-based information, appropriate large-scale assessment policy can be developed and implemented so that more and more English language learners with disabilities will be included in large-scale assessment and accountability programs. In turn, it is hoped that these well-deserving students and their families will experience enhanced daily school experiences with overall increased student academic outcomes—the overarching goal of standards-based measurement that are used for accountability purposes.

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Appendix A

Instruments:

Written Survey

Student Interview Protocol

Parent Interview Protocol

Teacher Interview Protocol

Written Survey

Directions: Answer the questions below for English language learners with disabilities when they take the state test. **There are no right or wrong answers!**

To answer the questions on this page questions, use:

1 = Never
2 = Rarely
3 = Usually
4 = Always

Please CIRCLE the best answers FOR YOUR SCHOOL.

1) In my school, English language learners with disabilities take the state test.	1	2	3	4
2) In my school, English language learners with disabilities use accommodations to take the state test.	1	2	3	4
3) English language learners with disabilities use ONLY special education accommodations to take the state test.	1	2	3	4
4) English language learners with disabilities use ONLY second language accommodations to take the state test.	1	2	3	4
5) English language learners with disabilities use BOTH special education and second language accommodations as needed to take the state test.	1	2	3	4
6) In my school English language learners with disabilities can demonstrate what they know and can do on the state test.	1	2	3	4
7) In my school, English language learners with disabilities complete <i>all</i> test items when they take the state test.	1	2	3	4
8) English language learners with disabilities complete about <i>half</i> of the test items when they take the state test.	1	2	3	4
9) English language learners with disabilities complete <i>ten or less</i> test items when they take the state test	1	2	3	4
10) In my school, English language learners with disabilities <i>can</i> be proficient on the state test.	1	2	3	4
11) English language learners with disabilities <i>are</i> proficient on the state test.	1	2	3	4
12) English language learners with disabilities <i>can</i> pass high stakes tests.	1	2	3	4
13) English language learners with disabilities <i>do</i> pass high states tests.	1	2	3	4
13) In my school, English language learners with disabilities' parents understand what the state test is.	1	2	3	4
14) English language learners with disabilities' parents understand what test accommodations are.	1	2	3	4
16) In my school, English language learners with disabilities understand what the state test is.	1	2	3	4

17) English language learners with disabilities understand what test accommodations are.	1	2	3	4
18) Most of the English language learners with disabilities in my school participate in an alternate assessment to the state test.	1	2	3	4
19) There is someone with second language expertise on English language learners with disabilities' IEP teams in my school.	1	2	3	4

PLEASE ANSWER AS BEST YOU CAN.

1) In your school, who decides what test accommodations English language learners with disabilities use to take the state test. (√ ALL that apply.)

- Special education teacher(s)
- Second language teacher(s)
- General education teacher(s)
- Parent(s)
- Student
- Other (If so, who? _____)
- Don't know

2) In your school, who knows English language learners with disabilities' family background information? (√ ALL that apply.)

- Special education teacher(s)
- Second language teacher(s)
- General education teacher(s)
- Parent(s)
- Student
- Other (If so, who? _____)
- Don't know

3) I teach or have taught:
(√ ALL that apply. Provide number of years taught also!)

- Special education (Number of years _____)
- English as a Second Language (Number of years _____)
- General education (Number of years _____)
- Other (If so, what?) _____ (Number of years _____)

4) I instruct or have instructed English language learners with disabilities.

(√ ALL that apply. Provide number of years taught also!)

_____ Special education	(Number of years _____)
_____ English as a Second Language	(Number of years _____)
_____ General education	(Number of years _____)
_____ Other (If so, what?) _____	(Number of years _____)

5) I have taught for a total of _____ years.

(√ ALL that apply. Provide number of years taught also!)

_____ RSP	(Number of years _____)
_____ SDC ... M/M	(Number of years _____)
_____ SDC ... M/S	(Number of years _____)

THANK YOU!

Student Interview Protocol

Opening: My name is (name) from the University of Minnesota. I am one of the researchers who is working in (school name) this week. I am doing a research study on how your teachers can work better with your parents. When we are finished, I have a gift card for you as a thank you for helping us with our research study. Do you have any questions about what we are going to do?

I will be writing down your answers to my questions. Is that all right with you? I will not be using your name in anything that I do for the project. Thank you. Let's begin.

Q1) Have you ever heard of the state test? How did you hear about this test?

PROBE: From your teacher? From your friends? From someone in your family? In the newspapers?

Do you know what these tests are for?

Do you know why these tests are important? If so, why are they?

Q2) Have you ever heard of test accommodations? Or possibly modifications?

How would you explain test accommodations to a friend or family member?

PROBE: Such as more time to take the test. Or, taking the test in a small group of students? Or, using a dictionary during the test?

What do you do when you take the state test?

Do you have anything there to help you understand the test better? Large print? A dictionary?

Do you take the test in your language? Or, in English?

Do these accommodations help you better understand the test?

How do these accommodations help you?

Q3) Do you know what an IEP team meeting is? If so, do you go to them? What happens there?

PROBE: Do you go to any meetings with your teachers and parents to talk about what you learn at school?

Do the people at the meeting ever talk about the state test? If so, do they talk to you about the test? Do you say anything about the test?

Do the people at the meeting ever talk about test accommodations? If so, do they talk to you about accommodations? If accommodations are used, do you help decide which accommodations to use to take tests?

Thank the participant and share the gift card!

Parent Interview Protocol

Opening: My name is (name) from the University of Minnesota. I am one of the researchers who is working in (school name) this week to conduct a research study on how teachers can work better with families who speak a language other than English at home. When we are finished, I have a gift card for you as a thank you for helping us with our research study. Do you have any questions about what we are going to do?

It's often difficult for me to remember and write down your answer quickly. Do you mind if I use a tape recorder for our interview. Your name will not be on the tape and I will never use your name in anything that I do for the study. Thank you. Let's begin.

Q1) Do you have time to talk to (student's name) teachers? If so, how often do you talk to them?

How do your child's teachers communicate with you? How often?

What is the easiest way for teachers to communicate with you?

PROBE: At school? In meetings? After or before school? On the telephone?

Do you usually call the teacher? Or, does the teacher call you first?

What suggestions do you have for improving communication between parents and teachers?

Q2) Which teachers do you talk to the most?

PROBE: Do you tend to talk to many teachers or just one or two of them?

What do the teachers talk to you about?

Q3) Have you ever heard of the state test? How did you hear about this?

PROBE: In the newspapers? From your child? From teachers at school? From friends or family members? From you child's IEP team meeting?

Do you know what these tests are for? How would you explain that to another adult in your family?

Q4) Have you ever heard of test accommodations?

PROBE: Such as more time to take the test. Or, taking the test in a small group of students? Or, using a dictionary during the test?

Does your child use test accommodations? If so, do you know which ones?

Have you ever heard of test modifications?

Does your child use test modifications? If so, do you know which ones?

Q5) Do teachers ever talk about statewide testing during IEP team meetings? During your child's IEP team meeting, what do teachers say about statewide testing?

Do teachers ever talk about test accommodations at IEP team meetings?

During your child's IEP team meeting, what things do teachers say about test accommodations?

Q6) Do teachers ever ask you questions about your culture so that they can understand (child's name) better?

PROBE: Do you have opportunities to share your culture with people at school?

Do teachers ever ask you questions about your language so that they can understand (child's name) better?

PROBE: Do (child's name) teachers know any (language) words?

Do teachers ever speak to you in your language (without an interpreter)?

Q7) Do you think you usually understand everything that teachers say to you through interpreters?

PROBE: Is an interpreter provided when you need one?

Do you think you usually understand everything that teachers write for you to read? If not, who helps you?

Q8) This is the last question! When you talk to other parents at school, do you usually talk to only those parents who speak your language?

PROBE: When you go to school activities, do you speak your language?
English? Both languages?

Thank the family appropriately and share gift card!

Teacher Interview Protocol

Opening: My name is (name) from the University of Minnesota. I am one of the researchers who is working in (school name) this week to conduct a research study on how teachers can work better with families who speak a language other than English at home. When we are finished, I have a gift card for you as a thank you for helping us with our research study. Do you have any questions about what we are going to do?

It's often difficult for me to remember and write down your answer quickly, so this group interview will be recorded. Your name will not be on the tape and I will never use your name in anything that I do for the study. Thank you. Let's begin.

Q1) When are you able to communicate with parents of English language learners with disabilities?

PROBE: At school? In meetings? After or before school? On the telephone?

Do you usually call the parent? Or, do they call you first?

What, besides language, are some obstacles to communicating with parents?

Q2) Of the teachers for English language learners with disabilities, who typically talks to the parents?

PROBE: Do some teachers tend to talk to the parents more than others? Why?

What do you (and/or other teachers) communicate to the families about?

What are some effective techniques for communicating with parents of English language learners with disabilities?

Q3) Do you think that parents of English language learners with disabilities know about statewide assessments? If so, how do they learn about them?

PROBE: In the newspapers? From their child? From teachers at school? From friends or family members?

How do you approach this complex topic with parents of English language learners with disabilities?

Do they know what these tests are for?

What testing issues surface the most often when communicating with parents of English language learners with disabilities?

When are these tests talked about with parents? In preparation for testing? In explaining test results? During IEP team meetings?

What would help you in communicating this information?

Q4) Do you think that parents know what test accommodations are? If so, how do you know this?

PROBE: Could parents identify the test accommodations that their children use for taking tests?

Do you ever have to explain the difference between accommodations and modifications?

Do you think that parents know what test accommodations are for?

When are test accommodations talked about with parents?

Q5) What do you do to learn about your students' cultural backgrounds so that you can understand them better? What do you do to learn about your students' languages? What have you learned that helps you instruct your students?

PROBE: Do parents and students have opportunities to share their culture with you at school? With other people at school?

PROBE: Do any of the teachers communicate in languages other than English?

Q6) Do you think that you have adequate information about the family background of the English language learners with disabilities that you instruct?

PROBE: Do you know where they were born? How long they have been in U.S. schools? Whether they went to school in their native country? What language(s) is spoken in their homes? Proficiency in English? Proficiency in native language(s)? Literacy in English? Literacy in native language(s)?

Which teachers know more about English language learners with disabilities' family background? How have they learned this information?

Q7) Do you talk with other teachers about English language learners with disabilities' participation in statewide tests? If so, which teachers?

Do you talk with other teachers about test accommodations? If so, which teachers? What do you talk about?

Q8) These are the last questions! How has your school performed on the state tests over the past few years? This past year in particular?

Why do you think this has occurred?

What is test day like for English language learners with disabilities?

What is being done to improve state test scores in your school? For English language learners with disabilities in particular?

Thank the teacher appropriately and share gift card!

Appendix B

Tabled Results by Written Survey Item

Table B1. Participation-Related Survey Data in Frequencies and Percentages

Survey Item	Never	Rarely	Usually	Always	Blank
English language learners with disabilities take the state tests	n = 1 1.3%	n = 2 2.6%	n = 40 51.9%	n = 32 41.6%	n = 2 2.6%
English language learners with disabilities use accommodations to take the state tests	n = 0	n = 11 14.3%	n = 42 54.5%	n = 23 29.9%	n = 2 2.6%
English language learners with disabilities use ONLY special education accommodations to take the state tests	n = 3 3.9%	n = 18 23.4%	n = 43 55.8%	n = 10 13.0%	n = 3 3.9%
English language learners with disabilities use ONLY second language accommodations to take the state tests	n = 9 11.7%	n = 35 45.5%	n = 22 28.6%	n = 7 9.1%	n = 4 5.2%
English language learners with disabilities use BOTH special education and second language accommodations to take the state tests	n = 8 10.4%	n = 14 18.2%	n = 36 46.8%	n = 16 20.8%	n = 3 3.9%
English language learners with disabilities complete all state test items	n = 0	n = 15 19.5%	n = 36 46.8%	n = 22 28.6%	n = 4 5.2%
English language learners with disabilities complete about half of the state test items	n = 10 13.0%	n = 27 35.1%	n = 23 29.9%	n = 10 13.0%	n = 7 9.1%
English language learners with disabilities complete ten or less state test items	n = 18 23.4%	n = 26 33.8%	n = 14 18.2%	n = 9 11.7%	n = 10 13.0%
Most of the English language learners with disabilities in my school participate in an alternate assessment to the state tests	n = 14 18.2%	n = 18 23.4%	n = 29 37.7%	n = 11 14.3%	n = 5 6.5%

Table B2. Performance-Related Survey Data in Frequencies and Percentages

Survey Item	Never	Rarely	Usually	Always	Blank
English language learners with disabilities can demonstrate what they know and can do on the state tests	n = 2 2.6%	n = 21 27.3%	n = 37 48.1%	n = 15 19.5%	n = 2 2.6%
English language learners with disabilities can be proficient on the state tests	n = 5 6.5%	n = 24 31.2%	n = 31 40.3%	n = 15 19.5%	n = 2 2.6%
English language learners with disabilities are proficient on the state tests	n = 6 7.8%	n = 41 53.2%	n = 18 23.4%	n = 8 10.4%	n = 4 5.2%
English language learners with disabilities can pass high stakes tests	n = 5 6.5%	n = 26 33.8%	n = 32 41.6%	n = 10 13.0%	n = 4 5.2%
English language learners with disabilities do pass high stakes tests	n = 6 7.8%	n = 35 45.5%	n = 23 29.9%	n = 6 7.8%	n = 7 9.1%

Table B3. Student and Parent-Related Survey Data in Frequencies and Percentages

Survey Item	Never	Rarely	Usually	Always	Blank
English language learners with disabilities' parents understand what the state tests are	n = 3 3.9%	n = 15 19.5%	n = 53 68.8%	n = 5 6.5%	n = 1 1.3%
English language learners with disabilities' parents understand what test accommodations are	n = 2 2.6%	n = 6 7.8%	n = 58 75.3%	n = 11 14.3%	n = 0
English language learners with disabilities understand what the state tests are	n = 1 1.3%	n = 13 16.9%	n = 52 67.5%	n = 10 13.0%	n = 1 1.3%
English language learners with disabilities understand what test accommodations are	n = 0	n = 11 14.3%	n = 53 68.8%	n = 11 14.3%	n = 2 2.6%