



TOOLKIT FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS WITH DISABILITIES

Communicating About Assessments with Parents of English Learners with Disabilities

TOOL 8

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Communicating About Assessments with Parents of English Learners with Disabilities

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English Learners with Disabilities Toolkit

The regulations for the 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), include a requirement that states develop an alternate English language proficiency (ELP) assessment for English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Additionally, ESSA requires, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) affirms, that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, including English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities, who cannot take the general content assessment must participate in alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards (AA-AAAS) in certain grades. This requirement means that Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams will need to annually make a decision for each English learner with a disability about whether the student should participate in an alternate assessment or a general assessment. This decision will need to be made for both the ELP assessment and in certain grades for the content assessments of reading/language arts, mathematics, and science as well as for any other content assessments the state has.

Purpose of the English Learners with Disabilities Toolkit

The *English Learners with Disabilities Toolkit* is designed to provide states and IEP teams with tools they can use to better understand their students who are English learners with disabilities and to determine in which state assessment (general or alternate) they should participate and whether accessibility features or accommodations are needed for their participation in any assessment. This toolkit does not address the development of complete IEPs for English learners with disabilities.

States and IEP teams can modify the tools included in this toolkit to reflect any differences in their English learners with disabilities populations or in their IEPs. They also can be adjusted to link to a state's own guidelines for participation in ELP and content assessments.

Overview of the English Learners with Disabilities Toolkit

Decisions about the participation of English learners with disabilities in state assessments (both ELP and content assessments) are among the more difficult decisions that the team makes. This toolkit presents a collection of tools to help states understand their population of English learners with disabilities. It also includes some tools that states can share with their districts, including several tools for IEP teams to use when making decisions about participation in assessments and about needed accessibility features and accommodations.

Tool 8

Communicating About Assessments with Parents of English Learners with Disabilities

To support informed assessment decision-making for English learners with disabilities, State Education Agencies (SEAs) play a crucial role in providing accessible, culturally responsive assessment information to parents. Because each assessment decision for these students is highly individualized, parents are key partners in making assessment decisions. They offer essential insights into their student’s unique strengths and needs. However, some parents may be most familiar with assessment systems outside the U.S. and others may encounter cultural or language barriers when navigating English-based assessment policies and information.

To fully contribute to assessment decision making, parents of English learners with disabilities need accessible, comprehensive, easy-to-understand information on several topics, including:

- The purpose and benefits of assessments.
- The specific assessments their student (an English learner with a disability) will take.
- The differences between general and alternate assessments of content and English language proficiency and any possible unintended consequences of participating in an alternate assessment.
- How assessment results will be used and interpreted.
- The available accessibility features for each assessment that will support a student’s disability-related and second-language needs.

Ideally, this information should reach parents at just the right time (e.g., prior to IEP meetings occur, prior to the English language proficiency testing window) to support high-quality decision making.

In reality, parents of English learners with disabilities often do not receive this type of information. Locating relevant SEA resources on assessment topics can be challenging, especially when resources are hosted solely on state websites, are written only in English, or lack specific information for English learners with disabilities. For instance, while an SEA resource on a state website explains the general English language proficiency assessment, a parent may not think to look on the website or may find the complexity of the website to be a barrier. Instead, the parent may turn to a community group or fellow parents for information. If a parent does know about the state website and finds the general English proficiency assessment resource, it may not be translated into the parent’s native language. The resource may also not include

specific guidance for students with disabilities who participate in that assessment. There may be a separate document communicating information about English learners with disabilities who take the alternate English proficiency assessment, reinforcing the mistaken idea that all English learners with disabilities require an alternate assessment.

To enhance assessment communication with parents of English learners with disabilities, SEAs can benefit from examining their currently published assessment resources for parents. How comprehensive are these resources? Do they give parents the understanding of the breadth of important assessment topics that is necessary for them to be partners in assessment decisions for their student? Are English learners with disabilities specifically addressed? States may wish to update or expand parent resources to ensure this important student group is included. In some cases, new resources may be needed to address emerging topics. In addition, it is important for an SEA to plan for the use of multiple communication strategies to disseminate information to parents. Local Education Agency (LEA) staff and the educators with whom they work are often key intermediaries who may have the strongest relationship to parents. SEAs can distribute parent-focused assessment resources about English learners with disabilities to LEAs using a variety of outreach methods, including social media, newsletters, emails, videos, phone calls, and in-person meetings.

By providing LEAs with relevant resources at key times—such as ahead of parent-teacher conferences—SEAs can foster inclusive, informed assessment decision-making. An effective SEA outreach plan may include:

- 1. Identifying resources to share:** Determining which assessment materials should be shared with parents of English learners with disabilities.
- 2. Determining who will reach out to LEAs:** Establishing which team within a SEA will share the resource. Multiple divisions may create information for parents (e.g., Assessment, English learner/Title III programs, Special Education).
- 3. Selecting LEA recipients:** Identifying key LEA staff members who will share these resources with educators or directly with parents. The most appropriate recipient of the resource may depend on the topic of that resource.
- 4. Choosing outreach strategies:** Outlining methods of communication with selected LEA recipients (e.g., state newsletters, a webinar, social media posts) and identifying who will distribute resources to educators and parents.
- 5. Setting a timeline:** Determining the best time to share a specific resource to facilitate parent involvement in assessment participation decisions for their English learner with a disability.

What are the important LEA or school events where resources could be shared? When do those events take place?

6. **Evaluating success:** Establishing a feedback system to determine whether parents received the information.

Overview of Tool 8

This tool contains information that SEAs can use to ensure their parent-focused assessment information is inclusive of assessments taken by English learners with disabilities. It also contains information on how to ensure that these parent resources are shared with LEA staff who can distribute information to parents.

Three components are included in Tool 8:

- **Tool 8-A:** Assessment Communication Inventory
- **Tool 8-B:** Outreach Plan for Distributing Parent Assessment Resources on English Learners with Disabilities to Local Education Agencies (LEAs)
- **Tool 8-C:** NCEO Resources on Assessment of English Learners with Disabilities

States may customize this tool to meet their needs. To download the Microsoft Word version of this resource, see https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/ELsDisToolkit_Tool8_CommunicatingParents.docx

Tool 8-A

Assessment Communication Inventory

Form A-1 describes a process for a State Education Agency (SEA) to conduct an inventory of parent assessment resources. The form is designed to help the state determine whether those parent assessment resources appropriately address the assessment of English learners with disabilities. When the form is completed, the information in it can be used to answer questions such as:

- What assessment communication do we create for all parents?
- Is that communication inclusive of assessments for English learners with disabilities?
- What topic areas are missing from our communications that should be communicated to parents of English learners with disabilities?
- What parent assessment resources might need to be updated or expanded to explicitly address English learners with disabilities?
- Do we need to develop new assessment resources for parents of English learners with disabilities?

States can adjust this form by adding sections, columns, rows, or options to fit a specific context.

Form A-1: Inventory of [State Education Agency Name]'s Parent Assessment Resources and Inclusion of English Learners with

Disabilities

Date resource inventory completed: [Date]

Resource Name and Publication Date	Creator	Format and Location	Assessment Type	Assessment Topics Addressed	Explicitly Addresses ELs with Disabilities	Notes
		<p><i>Format:</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Audio</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Digital</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hard copy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Video</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Web page</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (Describe)</p> <p><i>Location:</i></p>	<p><i>General Sum-</i></p> <p><i>mative</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Reading/ELA</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Science</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (Describe)</p> <p>AA-AAAS</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Reading/ELA</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Science</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (Describe)</p> <p>ELP</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> General ELP</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Alt ELP</p> <p><i>Other</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> [list]</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Accessibility features</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Administration procedures and logistics</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Assessments administered</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Parent participation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Participation benefits</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Participation decisions</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Preparing students</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Purposes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Understanding results</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (list):</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	

Resource Name and Publication Date	Creator	Format and Location	Assessment Type	Assessment Topics Addressed	Explicitly Addresses ELs with Disabilities	Notes
		Format: <input type="checkbox"/> Audio <input type="checkbox"/> Digital <input type="checkbox"/> Hard copy <input type="checkbox"/> Video <input type="checkbox"/> Web page <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Describe) <input type="checkbox"/> AA-AAAS <input type="checkbox"/> Reading/ELA <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics <input type="checkbox"/> Science <input type="checkbox"/> ELP <input type="checkbox"/> General ELP <input type="checkbox"/> Alt ELP <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> [list]	General Sum- <input type="checkbox"/> Reading/ELA <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics <input type="checkbox"/> Science <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Describe) <input type="checkbox"/> AA-AAAS <input type="checkbox"/> Reading/ELA <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics <input type="checkbox"/> Science <input type="checkbox"/> ELP <input type="checkbox"/> General ELP <input type="checkbox"/> Alt ELP <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> [list]	<input type="checkbox"/> Accessibility features <input type="checkbox"/> Administration procedures and logistics <input type="checkbox"/> Assessments administered <input type="checkbox"/> Parent participation <input type="checkbox"/> Participation benefits <input type="checkbox"/> Participation decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Preparing students <input type="checkbox"/> Purposes <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding results <input type="checkbox"/> Other (list):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
[Add more rows as needed]						

Notes. AA-AAAS = Alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards; Alt ELP = Alternate English language proficiency assessment; EL = English Learner; ELA = English language arts; ELP = English language proficiency assessment.

Looking at the Table... (Questions to answer)

1. What parent assessment resources might need to be updated or expanded to explicitly address English learners with disabilities?
2. What assessment topic areas are missing from our resources that should be communicated to parents of English learners with disabilities?
3. Do we need to develop any new assessment resources for parents of English learners with disabilities?

Tool 8-B Outreach Plan for Distributing Parent Assessment Resources on English Learners with Disabilities to Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

State Education Agencies (SEAS) may post parent resources on their website, expecting families to find these resources online. Effective communication with parent of English learners requires multiple methods of distributing information. Sharing parent resources directly with key LEA staff and encouraging those staff to share them with parents of English learners with disabilities can be an effective way to reach families. This tool includes a table to create an SEA outreach plan for these resources.

Form B-1: [State Education Agency Name] Outreach Plan for Distributing Parent Assessment Resources on English Learners with Disabilities to Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

School Year:

Resource Name	Key Messages	Who Will Share	LEA Recipient(s)	Communication Strategy (e.g., social media, webpage, newsletter, blog post or article, presentation, webinar, in-person event)	Timeline for Sharing	Evaluation Method for Communication Strategy Effectiveness
			___ English learner Coordinator ___ Special Education Coordinator ___ Assessment Coordinator ___ Principal ___ Other (list)			
			___ English learner Coordinator ___ Special Education Coordinator ___ Assessment Coordinator ___ Principal ___ Other (list)			

Resource Name	Key Messages	Who Will Share	LEA Recipient(s)	Communication Strategy <i>(e.g., social media, web page, newsletter, blog post or article, presentation, webinar, in-person event)</i>	Timeline for Sharing	Evaluation Method for Communication Strategy Effectiveness
			<input type="checkbox"/> English learner Coordinator <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education Coordinator <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment Coordinator <input type="checkbox"/> Principal <input type="checkbox"/> Other (list)			
[Add more rows as needed]						

Tool 8-C

NCEO Resources on Assessment of English Learners with Disabilities

The following resources, developed by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) and related projects, are intended to support State Education Agencies (SEAs) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in enhancing their understanding of assessments for English learners with disabilities, enabling them to communicate more effectively with parents and families. SEAs can distribute these resources to LEAs, as appropriate.

Resources to Share with LEAs

[*Accessibility Features and Accommodations: Information for Parents*](#) (2019). This short brief provides information on accessibility features in assessment and instruction. It is intended for parents of English learners, including parents of English learners with disabilities. The same text is available translated into Arabic, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Both print and audio versions of the information are available for each language and English on NCEO's [Parent-Educator Toolkit](#) webpage.

[*Working with IEP Teams to Make State Assessment Participation and Accessibility and Accommodations Decisions*](#) (2021). This document provides guidance to school leaders about working with IEP teams to make state assessment participation and accessibility and accommodations decisions for students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities. Parents should be a part of IEP teams. The resource highlights what school leaders should ensure IEP teams do when making decisions about state assessment participation, what factors IEP teams must not consider when making those decisions for students with disabilities, and what school leaders can do to ensure that IEP teams select appropriate accessibility features and accommodations for students with disabilities. It also gives talking points for school leaders to use when addressing key audiences on the topic.

[*What School Leaders Need to Do Before, During, and After the Assessment Window*](#) (2021). This resource highlights what school leaders should prepare for, do during, and do after state and district assessments are administered to students with disabilities, including English learners with disabilities. School leaders take actions to ensure that students can accurately show what they know and can do. They are aware that assessments must be administered according to standardized procedures and conditions, including the provision of accessibility supports and accommodations, so that there can be fair and valid interpretations of assessment results. The brief also gives talking points for school leaders to use when addressing key audiences on the topic.

Resources for SEAs

[*Using Data to Understand the Characteristics of English Learners with Disabilities in Your State*](#) (2024). This tool is designed to provide SEAs, particularly assessment staff, with templates to use to display data on the characteristics of English learners with disabilities. It includes templates for examining languages spoken at home, disability categories, and English language proficiency (ELP) levels on both the general and alternate ELP assessments. States may customize this tool as needed to meet their needs.

[*State Assessments for English Learners with Disabilities: State Data Display Templates*](#) (2024). This tool is designed to provide SEAs with templates to use to display state assessment participation and student characteristics data for English learners with disabilities. The templates are designed for a closer look at state assessment data but may be adapted for use with other types of assessments.

[*Deciding Whether an English Learner with a Disability Should Participate in the State Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessment*](#) (2024). This resource contains eight tools that can be used to document student characteristics and IEP team members' understanding of federal and state English language proficiency (ELP) assessment requirements. IEP teams should include parents. The resource also provides additional resources on decision-making approaches for ELP assessments. SEAs can adapt these tools before sharing with LEAs to ensure that all potential decision makers are informed about the state's ELP assessments and considerations for determining whether a student should participate in the alternate or general ELP assessment.

[*Deciding Whether an English Learner with a Disability Can Participate in All Domains of an English Language Proficiency Assessment*](#) (2024). This resource contains two tools that can be used to document IEP team members' understanding of federal and state requirements for English language proficiency assessment domain participation for English learners with disabilities. IEP teams should include parents. And a tool to support discussion of disability implications for domain participation. States may customize this tool to meet the needs of LEAs.

[*Deciding Whether an English Learner with a Disability Should Participate in State Alternate Assessments of Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science*](#) (2024). This resource contains eight individual tools that can be adapted, as needed, by SEAs to ensure that all potential IEP team decision makers are informed about the state's content assessments and considerations about participation decisions in the AA-AAAS or the general content assessment.

[*Planning for the Accessibility Needs of an English Learner with a Disability who Participates in State General Assessments*](#) (2024). This resource describes a collaborative planning process for determining the access needs of an individual English learner with a disability who will take general assessments. A model planning process called an Accessibility Plan, is highlighted.

This plan incorporates parent input. Four individual tools are included to address each portion of the accessibility plan: student characteristics and experiences, instructional and assessment planning for accessibility, and evaluation. A final tool contains a sample accessibility plan filled out for an English learner who participates in state general assessments.

Planning for the Accessibility Needs of an English Learner with a Disability Who Participates in State Alternate Assessments (2024). This resource describes a collaborative planning process for determining the access needs of an individual English learner with a significant cognitive disability who will take alternate assessments. A model planning process called an Accessibility Plan is highlighted. This plan incorporates parent input. Three individual tools are included to address each portion of the accessibility plan: student characteristics and experiences, instructional and assessment planning for accessibility, and evaluation. A final tool contains a sample accessibility plan filled out for an English learner who participates in state alternate assessments.

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