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Improving the validity of assessment results
for English language learners with disabilities

Including students who are blind or visually impaired in English language proficiency assessments: A review of state policies

By Laurene L. Christensen, Debra A. Albus, Aleksis Kincaid, Elizabeth Christian, Kristi K. Liu, and Martha L. Thurlow



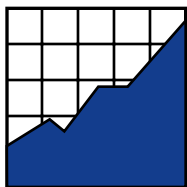
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Executive Summary

English language learners (ELLs) with and without disabilities are required to participate in all state and district assessments, including assessments used for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to demonstrate academic proficiency in different content areas for accountability purposes (Title I), assessments used to measure annual growth in English proficiency (Title III, i.e., Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking), and other state and local assessments administered to all students.

This report updates information on state participation and accommodations policies for ELLs who are Blind/Visually Impaired (VI) on English language proficiency (ELP) assessments used for Title III accountability. Accommodations policies are discussed with reference to seven accommodations in three categories that are commonly used by ELLs who are Blind/VI. Included are five accommodations from the Presentation category (Braille, Large Print, Read Aloud Directions, Read Aloud Questions, Screen Reader/Text to Speech), one accommodation from the Response category (Braille), and one accommodation from the Equipment category (Magnification Equipment).

Key findings include:

- Of 49 states with participation criteria, slightly more than half ($n=29$) allowed **selective participation** (i.e., requiring a student to take some parts of an ELP assessment, such as Reading and Writing, but not others, such as Listening or Speaking) based on a specific disability. Of these, 24 allowed selective participation for ELLs who were Blind/VI.
- Across all domains, **Braille**, **Large Print**, and **Magnification Equipment** appeared to be the least controversial accommodations. Most state policies allowed the use of Braille ($n=38$ – 40 states across domains), Large Print ($n=42$ – 46 states across domains), and Magnification Equipment ($n=38$ – 39 states across domains) accommodations.
- Only a few states had policies about **Read Aloud Directions**. States were more likely to allow Read Aloud Directions in Writing ($n=8$) and Reading ($n=6$) than Listening and Speaking ($n=5$).
- States' policies on **Read Aloud Questions** varied across assessment domains. Read Aloud Questions was not allowed on the Reading domain of the ELP assessment by any state, while 30 states allowed its use on the Writing domain. States were also less likely to allow Read Aloud Questions in Listening ($n=2$) and Speaking ($n=3$) domains.
- The use of a **Braille** was prohibited in Writing by roughly half of states ($n=25$), and consistently allowed in 4 states on all assessments.

- The majority of states did not have policies on the **Screen Reader/Text to Speech** accommodation. Of the 5 states that did have policies, states either consistently allowed it, allowed it with implications, or prohibited it across all domains.

These findings suggest that states are beginning to address the needs of ELLs who are Blind/VI. However, the lack of state policies on accommodations for this population demonstrates that there is still a large amount of work to do in defining policy for this population. States will need to investigate the purpose of the tests, and take into account how new technologies can help ELLs who are Blind/VI gain access to ELP assessments. States should also determine whether and in what circumstances selective participation by domain is appropriate for ELLs who are Blind/VI, and if appropriate, how composite scores will be obtained for these students.

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Overview

From 1992 to the present, reports published by NCEO have tracked the changes made to federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as well as the impact of these changes on the participation and inclusion of students with disabilities in state assessments, the participation options available to students, and the accommodations that may or may not be used by students with disabilities on state assessments (Christensen, Braam, Scullin, & Thurlow, 2011; Christensen, Lazarus, Crone, & Thurlow, 2008; Clapper, Morse, Lazarus, Thompson, & Thurlow, 2005; Lazarus, Thurlow, Lail, Eisenbraun, & Kato, 2006; Thurlow, Lazarus, Thompson, & Robey, 2002; Thurlow, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1995a, 199b; Thurlow, Seyfarth, Scott, & Ysseldyke, 1997; Thurlow, Ysseldyke, & Silverstein, 1993). These reports have focused on participation in state content assessments (i.e., Reading/English Language Arts, Math, and Science). Under Title I and III of ESEA, students with disabilities who are English language learners (ELLs) are also required to take annual state assessments measuring English language proficiency (ELP) in Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking (No Child Left Behind, 2001).

Because the focus of ELP assessments is to measure levels of proficiency in English language skills across specific domains (e.g., Speaking, Listening), it is important for policymakers to consider diverse linguistic and disability perspectives when developing their state participation and accommodation policies for these assessments. NCEO previously highlighted this need in reports that analyzed the participation and accommodation policies for ELLs with disabilities in ELP assessments (Albus & Thurlow, 2007, 2008). These reports analyzed accommodations using the categories of “indirect linguistic support” and “direct linguistic support” that had been put forth by George Washington University’s Center for Equity and Excellence in Education website and had been used in previous policy studies (Rivera & Collum, 2006). Although this current report does not use these linguistic categories in analyzing the data collected, we have drawn from linguistic and disability perspectives throughout the process of this study and in the interpretation of the policies.

An additional recent report published as part of the Improving the Validity of Assessment Results for English Language Learners with Disabilities (IVARED) project focused on state participation and accommodations policies for the broad population of ELLs with disabilities on ELP assessments in the 2009–2010 school year (Christensen, Albus, Liu, Thurlow, & Kincaid, 2013). Two related reports focusing on state participation and accommodation policies relevant to ELLs who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and ELLs who are Blind/Visually Impaired (VI) were developed, due to the unique needs of these low incidence populations. This report addresses state participation and accommodation policies relevant to the assessment of ELLs who are Blind/VI. State policies relevant to the assessment of ELLs who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing are addressed in another report (Christensen, Albus, Kincaid, Liu, Christian, & Thurlow, 2014).

States face several challenges in assessing the English language proficiency of ELLs who are Blind/VI. States must report on the progress of all ELLs in the domains of Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking, although the disability of students who are Blind/VI may preclude them from participating meaningfully in certain domains of assessment (specifically the Reading and Writing domains) in the same way as their peers without disabilities. States must provide scores for each individual student in each assessment domain for accountability purposes, and students must have scores in each assessment domain in order to exit English language instruction programs. To ensure that ELLs who are Blind/VI participate meaningfully in ELP assessments, states have developed participation and accommodations policies to direct Individual Education Program (IEP) teams making decisions for individuals in this population. These policies are examined in detail in this report.

Process Used to Review State Policies

This abbreviated report relied on methods that are described in more detail in the full report on all state participation and accommodation policies for the broad population of ELLs with disabilities on ELP assessments (Christensen et al., 2013). A search for online state participation and accommodation policies for 2009–2010 English proficiency assessments occurred during October, 2010, and March, 2011. Policies for the 50 states and Washington, DC were collected. Some states' accommodation policies were not available online publicly. For example, for one state, an administration manual for a consortium-developed assessment was publicly available but it was not available on any of the other state websites. The data from this document along with information available at the consortium's website were sent for verification to leading staff for the consortium before being added to summary documents that were sent to states for verification. See Christensen et al. (2013) for more information on the processes used to review state policies, and for informational tables on states' participation and accommodations policies.

Organization of Report

This report is divided in two sections. Section 1 presents information collected on state participation policies for ELLs who are Blind/VI. Section 2 presents a review of state accommodation policies focused on the four domains of the ELP assessment: Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening. Section 2 also includes an analysis of seven selected accommodations, a discussion of state administration guidelines, and a review of the use of accommodations on computer-based ELP assessments. The selected accommodations highlighted in this report are those that are often used by Blind/VI students to meet their specific needs. These accommodations include Braille, Large Print, Read Aloud Directions, Read Aloud Questions, Screen Reader, Brailier, and Magnification Equipment.

Accommodation policies for the ELP assessment are compared to those for the content assessment in the discussion section of this report. Information about accommodations for the content assessment is based on 2009 state policies (Christensen et al., 2011). All assessment policies presented in figures and tables are from documents collected for the 2009–2010 year (see Christensen et al., 2013, for more information).

Section 1 - Participation Policies

In this section, we examine the participation options and criteria states provided to IEP teams to guide decision making about which portions of the ELP assessment ELLs participated in. For the purposes of this report, we only present participation options that may affect ELLs who are blind or who have visual impairments.

Participation Options

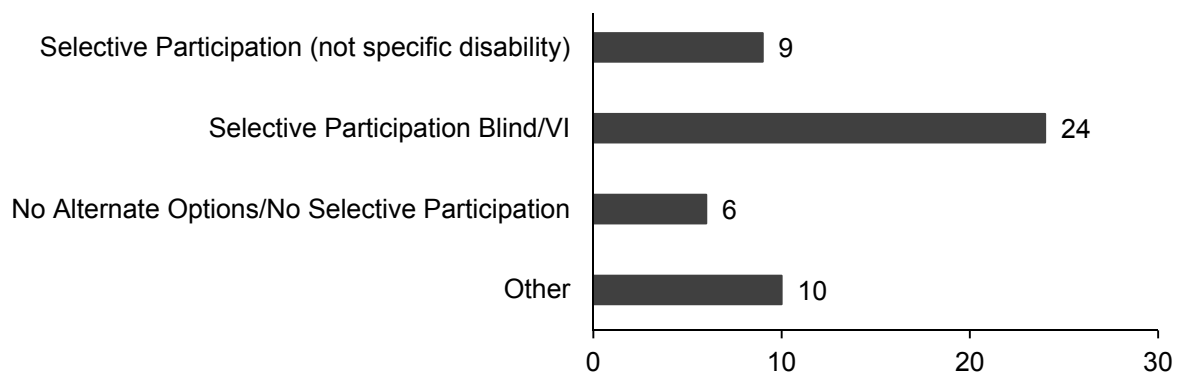
ELLs participate in all domains of the ELP assessment (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking) with or without accommodations. Some states allow alternate assessment options for specific domains on the ELP assessment, or for the whole assessment.

In addition to participation with or without accommodations, and participation in alternate assessments, some states allow selective participation for ELLs on the ELP assessment. Selective participation means a state allows some ELLs to take certain parts of the ELP assessment without being required to take others, such as taking the Listening and Speaking tests but not taking the Reading and Writing tests. Sometimes selective participation is allowed without limitations, but often it is only available for a specific type of disability (e.g., Blind/VI).

Participation policies were obtained for 50 states; the state of Connecticut did not have a policy publicly available. Ten additional states did not have information available in policy documents about selective participation. Guidelines for selective participation were reviewed in policies from the remaining 40 states. Figure 1 illustrates the participation options available to Blind/VI students. Policies in two states allowed selective participation for students who were Deaf/Hard of Hearing only, so these states are not included in Figure 1. In total, 35 states allowed selective participation for certain ELLs on the ELP assessment, with nine states allowing this option without reference to a specific disability. Policies in 24 of the 35 states allowed students who were Blind/VI to selectively participate. For example, policies from the state of Oregon indicated that students who are blind may selectively participate because they are unable to meaningfully access portions of the computer-based assessment, and no braille version is available (Christensen et al., 2013). Selective participation was prohibited in six states, requiring all ELLs to participate fully. An additional 10 states (represented by the “Other” category) al-

lowed an IEP team to decide whether all domains of a state’s ELP assessment were appropriate for an ELL student. Certain policies that addressed alternate or alternative assessments are not included in Figure 1. States with plans to develop alternate assessments at the time of our study are not represented in Figure 1 because the policies had not taken effect. For more information on participation policies for ELLs with disabilities on the ELP assessment, see the full IVARED accommodations report (Christensen et al., 2013).

Figure 1. Summary of Types of Additional Participation Options



Note: n=38. Several states fell into more than one of the categories shown above. Numbers in the figure do not sum to 38.

Section 2 - Accommodation Policies

In this section, we examine the accommodations policies states provided to IEP teams to guide decision making about which accommodations could be used by ELLs on ELP assessments. For the purposes of this report, we present accommodations options that affect ELLs who are Blind/VI.

Accommodation policies for ELP assessments were publicly available online for 49 of the 51 states (including Washington, DC) that we examined. In two states, Connecticut and Iowa, there were no accommodation policies available on either the state website or a consortium website that provided accommodation policy information for a consortium-developed assessment.

Type of Accommodation and Impact of Use

In the following section, tables illustrate how seven accommodations commonly used by ELLs who are Blind/VI (Braille, Large Print, Read Aloud Directions, Read Aloud Questions, Screen Reader, Braille, and Magnification Equipment) impact scoring in each of the four domains on the ELP assessment, as noted in state accommodations policies. The seven highlighted accommodations fall into three broad accommodations categories: Presentation (Braille, Large

Print, Read Aloud Directions, Read Aloud Questions, Screen Reader/Text to Speech); Response (Braille); and Equipment (Magnification Equipment).

Assessment scores are affected by the use of accommodations in one of several ways. Accommodations may be allowed, allowed in certain circumstances, allowed with implications for scoring, allowed in certain circumstances and with implications for scoring, or prohibited. A particular accommodation may be categorized differently in different state policies (e.g., some states may allow the use of Read Aloud Directions on the Listening assessment, while other states prohibit the same accommodation). These differences are examined in detail here.

The majority of states had policies for Braille, Large Print, Read Aloud Questions, Braille, and Magnification Equipment. Very few states had policies on the use of Read Aloud Directions, ($n=5-8$) and Screen Reader/Text to Speech ($n=5$) across the four domains of the ELP assessment.

Reading

Table 1 summarizes state policies for accommodations that are used by ELLs who are Blind/VI for the Reading domain of the ELP assessment. Under Presentation accommodations, we address Braille, Large Print, Read Aloud Directions, Read Aloud Questions, and Screen Reader. The majority of states' policies allowed Braille ($n=40$) and Large Print ($n=46$). Fewer states had policies on the use of Read Aloud Directions and Read Aloud Questions on the Reading domain of the ELP assessment. Of eight states with policies addressing the use of Read Aloud Directions, the majority permitted its use ($n=6$). Read Aloud Questions was frequently prohibited by states with policies addressing its use on the Reading domain. Only one state allowed Screen Reader/Text to Speech in the Reading domain.

ELLs were allowed to use the Braille accommodation on the Reading assessment in four states, and one state allowed it in certain circumstances. Under the Equipment category, 39 states allowed Magnification Equipment for Reading on the ELP assessment.

Table 1. Number of States where Policies Allowed or Prohibited Selected Accommodations on the Reading Domain of the ELP Assessment

Accommodation	Type of Accommodation/Impact of Use ^a					
	A	AC	AI	AC/AI	P	NI
Presentation						
Braille	40	2 ³	0	0	1	8
Large Print	46 ¹	0	0	0	0	5
Read Aloud Directions	6 ²	1	0	0	1	43
Read Aloud Questions	0	1	3	0	5	42
Screen Reader/Text to Speech	1	0	1	0	3	46
Response						
Braille	4	1	0	0	0	46
Equipment						
Magnification Equipment	39	0	0	0	0	12

^aA = Allowed with IEP or 504; AC = Allowed in Certain Circumstances; AI = Allowed with Implications for Scoring; AC/AI = Allowed in Certain Circumstances and there are Implications for Scoring; P = Prohibited; NI = No Policy or No Information.

¹One state allowed Large Print for any ELL.

²One state allowed Read Aloud Directions for any ELL.

³One of these states allowed any ELL to use Braille in certain circumstances.

Definitions:

Braille = all parts of the assessment are presented in braille.

Braille = device or computer that generates responses in braille.

Large Print = all parts of the assessment are in print larger than that typically used.

Magnification Equipment = equipment that enlarges the print size of the test.

Read Aloud Directions = the directions portion of the assessment is read to the student.

Read Aloud Questions = the assessment items are read to the student.

Screen Reader/Text to Speech = student's verbal responses are transferred to text via speech/text device.

Writing

Table 2 summarizes state accommodation policies for the Writing domain of the ELP assessment. Under the Presentation category, 40 states allowed Braille, and 46 states allowed Large Print. Policies in a small number of states allowed the use of other accommodations in this category or placed more limitations on their use. Though only addressed in five state policies, the Screen Reader/Text to Speech accommodation appears to be somewhat controversial when used on the Writing domain of the ELP assessment. Similar numbers of states prohibited and allowed the accommodation, and one additional state allowed it with implications for scoring.

Under the Response category, four states allowed Braille, and policies in 25 states prohibited it. Policies in 38 states allowed Magnification Equipment on the Writing domain of the ELP assessment.

Table 2. Number of States where Policies Allowed or Prohibited Selected Accommodations on the Writing Domain of the State ELP Assessment

Accommodation	Type of Accommodation/Impact of Use ^a					
	A	AC	AI	AC/AI	P	NI
Presentation						
Braille	40	2 ²	0	0	1	8
Large Print	46 ¹	0	0	0	0	5
Read Aloud Directions	8	1	0	0	1	41
Read Aloud Questions	30	1	0	0	2	18
Screen Reader/Text to Speech	2	0	1	0	2	46
Response						
Braille	4	1	0	0	25	21
Equipment						
Magnification Equipment	38	0	0	0	0	13

^aA = Allowed with IEP or 504; AC = Allowed in Certain Circumstances; AI = Allowed with Implications for Scoring; AC/AI = Allowed in Certain Circumstances and there are Implications for Scoring; P = Prohibited; NI = No Policy or No Information.

¹One state allowed Large Print for any ELL.

²One of these states allowed Braille for any ELL.

Definitions:

Braille = all parts of the assessment are presented in braille.

Braille = device or computer that generates responses in braille.

Large Print = all parts of the assessment are in print larger than that typically used.

Magnification Equipment = equipment that enlarges the print size of the test.

Read Aloud Directions = the directions portion of the assessment is read to the student.

Read Aloud Questions = the assessment items are read to the student.

Screen Reader/Text to Speech = student's verbal responses are transferred to text via speech/text device.

Listening

Table 3 summarizes state policies for accommodations that are used by ELLs who are Blind/VI for the Listening domain of the ELP assessment. The majority of states allowed the use of Braille ($n=38$) and Large Print ($n=44$) on the Listening domain of the ELP assessment. A

small number of states allowed the use of other presentation accommodations or placed more limitations on their use. The use of a Braille was allowed in all four states that addressed it in accommodations policies, and Magnification Equipment was allowed in 38 states on the Listening domain of the ELP assessment.

Table 3. Number of States where Policies Allowed or Prohibited Selected Accommodations on the Listening Domain of the State ELP Assessment

Accommodation	Type of Accommodation/Impact of Use ^a					
	A	AC	AI	AC/AI	P	NI
Presentation						
Braille	38	2 ³	0	0	2	9
Large Print	44 ¹	0	0	0	0	7
Read Aloud Directions	5 ²	1	0	0	1	44
Read Aloud Questions	2	1	0	0	3	45
Screen Reader/Text to Speech	2	0	1	0	1	47
Response						
Braille	4	1	0	0	0	46
Equipment						
Magnification Equipment	38	0	0	0	0	13

^aA = Allowed with IEP or 504; AC = Allowed in Certain Circumstances; AI = Allowed with Implications for Scoring; AC/AI = Allowed in Certain Circumstances and there are Implications for Scoring; P = Prohibited; NI = No Policy or No Information.

¹One state allowed Large Print for any ELL.

²One state allowed any ELL to use Read Aloud Directions.

³One state allowed any ELL to use Braille in certain circumstances.

Definitions:

Braille = all parts of the assessment are presented in braille.

Braille = device or computer that generates responses in braille.

Large Print = all parts of the assessment are in print larger than that typically used.

Magnification Equipment = equipment that enlarges the print size of the test.

Read Aloud Directions = the directions portion of the assessment is read to the student.

Read Aloud Questions = the assessment items are read to the student.

Screen Reader/Text to Speech = student's verbal responses are transferred to text via speech/text device.

Speaking

Table 4 summarizes state policies for accommodations that are used by ELLs who are Blind/VI for the Speaking domain of the ELP assessment. The majority of states allowed the use of Braille ($n=38$) and Large Print ($n=42$) on the Speaking domain of the ELP assessment. A small number of states allowed the other presentation accommodations, or placed limitations on their use. Although few states addressed the use of Read Aloud Questions on the Speaking test in their policies ($n=7$), the accommodation was somewhat controversial. Read Aloud Questions was allowed in three states, while three prohibited it and one additional state allowed it to be used only under certain circumstances. The use of a Braille was allowed in four states on the ELP assessment. Magnification Equipment was allowed in 38 states.

Table 4. Number of States where Policies Allowed or Prohibited Selected Accommodations on the Speaking Domain of the State ELP Assessment

Accommodation	Type of Accommodation/Impact of Use ^a					
	A	AC	AI	AC/AI	P	NI
Presentation						
Braille	38	2 ³	0	0	2	9
Large Print	42 ¹	0	0	0	1	8
Read Aloud Directions	5 ²	1	0	0	1	44
Read Aloud Questions	3	1	0	0	3	44
Screen Reader/Text to Speech	2	0	1	0	1	47
Response						
Braille	4	1	0	0	0	46
Equipment						
Magnification Equipment	38	0	0	0	0	13

^aA = Allowed with IEP or 504; AC = Allowed in Certain Circumstances; AI = Allowed with Implications for Scoring; AC/AI = Allowed in Certain Circumstances and there are Implications for Scoring; P = Prohibited; NI = No Policy or No Information.

¹One state allowed Large Print for any ELL.

²One state allowed Read Aloud Directions for any ELL student.

³One state allowed any ELL to use Braille in certain circumstances.

Definitions:

Braille = all parts of the assessment are presented in braille.

Braille = device or computer that generates responses in braille.

Large Print = all parts of the assessment are in print larger than that typically used.

Magnification Equipment = equipment that enlarges the print size of the test.

Read Aloud Directions = the directions portion of the assessment is read to the student.

Read Aloud Questions = the assessment items are read to the student.

Screen Reader/Text to Speech = student's verbal responses are transferred to text via speech/text device.

Accommodation Summaries Across Domains

This section provides an overview of the policies for each accommodation across the four ELP assessment domains detailed in the previous section. State results are presented as a range (for example, Large Print was allowed in 42 to 46 states depending on which assessment domain was investigated).

Braille

The use of Braille was allowed in 38 to 40 states across domains of the ELP assessment. In two states, Braille was allowed in certain circumstances across all domains of the ELP assessment. One state prohibited the use of Braille on the Reading and Writing domains of the assessment, and two states prohibited it for Listening and Speaking.

Large Print

The use of the Large Print accommodation was fairly non-controversial. A range of 42 to 46 states allowed Large Print across domains on the ELP assessment. Only one state prohibited Large Print for the Speaking portion of the ELP assessment.

Read Aloud Directions

The majority of states did not have policies on the use of Read Aloud Directions on the ELP assessment. Across domains, five to eight states allowed Read Aloud Directions. The accommodation was allowed in certain circumstances by one state across all domains, and one state prohibited Read Aloud Directions across all domains of the ELP assessment.

Read Aloud Questions

Read Aloud Questions was allowed in up to 30 states across domains of the ELP assessment. Across domains, two to five states prohibited the accommodation, with more states prohibiting its use on the Reading test than on the Writing, Listening, or Speaking tests. Policy in one state allowed Read Aloud Questions in certain circumstances across all domains, and policies in three states allowed it with implications for scoring on the Reading domain of the ELP assessment (no state policy indicated that Read Aloud Questions was allowed with scoring implications on any of the other three assessment domains). It appears that the use of the Read Aloud Questions accommodation was more controversial with reference to its use on the Reading test than on tests in the other three domains. For example, more states prohibited the use of the Read Aloud Questions accommodation on the Reading test than on the other three domain tests, and

no state allowed its use on the Reading test while a few states allowed its use on tests in the other three domains.

Screen Reader/Text to Speech

Across domains of the ELP assessment, only five states addressed the use of the Screen Reader accommodation, and these states were divided on the appropriate use of a screen reader. In two states a screen reader was allowed across domains and one state consistently allowed it with implications for scoring. Across domains, one to two states explicitly prohibited the use of Screen Reader/Text to Speech on the ELP assessment.

Braille

Across domains, four states allowed a Braille to be used on the ELP assessment. Across domains, one state consistently allowed the use of a Braille in certain circumstances. Only five states addressed the use of the Braille accommodation on the Reading, Listening, and Speaking tests. On the other hand, this accommodation was addressed by 30 states in reference to the Writing test. Most states with a policy on the Braille accommodation for the Writing test prohibited its use ($n=25$). No state prohibited the use of the Braille accommodation in the other domains of the ELP assessment.

Magnification Equipment

Magnification Equipment did not appear to be a controversial accommodation on the ELP assessment. Policies in 38 to 39 states allowed Magnification Equipment across domains of the ELP assessment.

Administration Guidelines

There were 41 states that provided some type of administration guidelines for implementing accommodations on the ELP assessment, although these guidelines did not always address the administration accommodations relevant to Blind/VI students. For example, 38 states allowed the Read Aloud Questions accommodation on at least one of the four assessment domains, but only four states provided guidelines for readers. Guidelines were provided for the use of other accommodations that are not examined in detail in this report, but that may benefit Blind/VI students. For example, guidelines were provided for scribes in 34 states, and guidelines for transcribers were provided in 32 states on the ELP assessment. A scribe assists students in physically recording responses to assessment questions during a test. A transcriber is a person who records answers from one response format into another format after the assessment has already been administered (i.e., a transcriber may write a students' spoken answer).

Accommodation Policies by Computer-based ELP Assessments

An increasing number of states have changed assessments and policies to incorporate computer-based delivery of the ELP assessment in recent years (Thurlow, Lazarus, Albus, & Hodgson, 2010). Computer-based ELP assessments were administered in three states: Massachusetts, Oregon, and Texas. Participation policies for computer-based ELP assessments varied in the restrictions they placed on selective participation (i.e., whether a student needed to have an IEP for a disability such as Blind/VI).

Table 5 presents a comparison of accommodation policies for the seven common accommodations administered to ELLs who are Blind/VI in the three states with computer-delivered ELP assessments. Braille was not allowed on any domain in two states, and one state had no information about the use of the accommodation on the ELP assessment. Large Print was allowed by one state on all domains, one state policy allowed it for Reading and Writing only, and one state policy contained no information about the accommodation on the ELP assessment. Read Aloud Directions was allowed by one state in Writing. In the same state, Read Aloud Directions could be used in other domains with implications for scoring on the ELP assessment. Documents in two states offered no information about Read Aloud Directions on the ELP assessment. Read Aloud Questions was allowed by one state for the Writing domain on writing passages and questions, but that state did not allow the accommodation for any other domains of the ELP assessment. Policies in two states did not contain information about Read Aloud Questions. In one state, Screen Reader/Text to Speech was not allowed on any domain. Other states did not mention the use of Screen Reader/Text to Speech on the ELP assessment. Policy documents in one state policy noted that Braille was not available on any domain, and policies in the other two states did not have information on the use of Braille. Finally, Magnification Equipment was allowed by one state on all domains, and the state policy mentioned inclusion of software for its use. In two states, Magnification Equipment was allowed for one or more domains.

Table 5. Comparison of Policies Across States with Online ELP Assessments

Accommodation	Allowed for all domains	Allowed for one or more domains	Not available for any domain	Not allowed for any domain	No information
Presentation					
Braille	0	0	0	2	1
Large Print	1	1	0	0	1
Read Aloud Directions	0	1	0	0	2
Read Aloud Questions	0	1	0	0	2
Screen Reader/Text to Speech	0	0	0	1	2
Response					
Braille	0	0	1	0	2
Equipment					
Magnification Equipment	1	2	0	0	0

Definitions:

Braille = all parts of the assessment are presented in braille.

Braille = device or computer that generates responses in braille.

Large Print = all parts of the assessment are in print larger than that typically used.

Magnification Equipment = equipment that enlarges the print size of the test.

Read Aloud Directions = the directions portion of the assessment is read to the student.

Read Aloud Questions = the assessment items are read to the student.

Screen Reader/Text to Speech = student’s verbal responses are transferred to text via speech/text device.

Discussion

Participation Policies

The majority of the 50 states and Washington, DC offered policy information online for their ELP assessments ($n=50$). The only state without public participation policies available was Connecticut. States addressed the participation of ELLs who are Blind/VI on the ELP assessment in very different ways. Policies in a little over half of the states allowed options in addition to regular participation on all domains of an ELP assessment. Some states allowed students to take alternate assessments for one or more domains on the ELP assessment, while other states allowed selective participation for some ELLs. Among states that had policies allowing selective participation for certain students on the ELP assessment, nine did not place restrictions on selective participation by disability, and 29 states restricted selective participation to ELLs with a specific disability. Of these 29 states, 24 states allowed selective participation for ELLs who were Blind/VI on the ELP assessment. Policies in one state allowed an alternate way for assessing ELLs with disabilities on the ELP assessment, in part or for the whole assessment.

More states now include information on the variables that can be used to make decisions about ELP assessment participation, and more state policies include considerations for the unique assessment needs of ELLs who are Blind/VI on certain domains of the ELP assessment (Albus & Thurlow, 2007; Christensen et al., 2013).

Accommodation Summaries

Previous reports published by NCEO and through the IVARED project have examined state participation and accommodation policies for content and ELP assessments. In this section, the results for each accommodation are summarized and compared to current state policies on content assessments and past state policies on ELP assessments.

Braille and Large Print

The use of Large Print was not controversial, in the respect that most state policies addressing its use allowed it (Large Print was allowed in 42 to 46 states). Only one state prohibited Large Print for the Speaking domain. Braille, allowed in 40 states, was more controversial. Although some states in a consortium allowed Braille, the consortium to which they belong explicitly mentioned that this accommodation was inadvisable on the ELP assessment. Only one state prohibited Braille on the Listening and Speaking tests.

The majority of states allowed Braille and Large Print on content assessments ($n=47$ and $n=49$, respectively; Christensen et al., 2011). For both accommodations, the remaining states allowed the use of Braille or Large Print with some restrictions such as implications for scoring or unique aggregation. In a previous report on ELP assessment policies, 17 states allowed Large Print, one state allowed Large Print with implications for scoring, and one state prohibited its use on the ELP assessment (Albus & Thurlow, 2007). Albus & Thurlow also reported that Braille was allowed across domains in six states, was allowed with implications for scoring in two states, and was prohibited on one or more domains in one state (2007). Current state policies indicate greater acceptance of allowing Large Print and Braille accommodations on ELP assessments than in the past.

Read Aloud Directions and Questions

Historically, Read Aloud Questions has been a more controversial accommodation on ELP assessments than Reading Aloud Directions, meaning that some state policies allow the accommodation while others prohibit it (Albus & Thurlow, 2007). The number of states whose policies allow and prohibit these accommodations should be interpreted carefully. With the exception of the Writing domain, these two accommodations were only addressed by a small number of states (fewer than 10). One reason many states did not have policies on Read Aloud Directions

could be due to its inclusion in test administration guidelines for the ELP assessment. Alternately, some states may see Read Aloud Directions as best practices for all students who require the accommodation. In contrast, the majority of states allowed Read Aloud Questions on the Writing domain of the ELP assessment ($n=30$), but fewer states addressed its use on other domains. On the Reading, Listening, and Speaking tests, both the Read Aloud Directions and the Read Aloud Questions accommodations were allowed, allowed in certain circumstances, allowed with implications for scoring, or prohibited by one to six states, indicating lack of agreement among states on how they should be used.

On content assessments, Read Aloud Directions was allowed without restriction in a greater number of states ($n=32$) than the Read Aloud Questions accommodation ($n=9$) (Christensen et al., 2011). Most ($n=40$) state policies indicated that Read Aloud Questions was only allowed on content assessments in certain circumstances (Christensen et al., 2011).

In the previous ELP report, policies in four states allowed Read Aloud Directions across all domains of the ELP assessment, two states allowed it with implications for scoring, and one state prohibited it for one or more domains (Albus & Thurlow, 2007). Similar results were obtained in the current report, with a range of four to eight states allowing Read Aloud Directions. The numbers of states where Read Aloud Directions was allowed with implications for scoring or prohibited were also about the same as in the previous report.

States' accommodation policies for the ELP assessment in 2006 indicated that the Read Aloud Questions accommodation was allowed across all domains in five states (Albus & Thurlow, 2007). In three states, Read Aloud Questions was allowed for one or more, but not all, domains. In addition, four states allowed the accommodation with implications for scoring, and two states prohibited it for one or more domains on the ELP assessment. Compared to the policies examined in this report, the number of states that allowed Read Aloud Questions increased to 30 states for the Writing domain. Only a few states allowed the accommodation on other domains of the ELP assessment.

Screen Reader/Text to Speech

Many states did not have policies for the use of a Screen Reader on the ELP assessment, but those states that did have policies placed different restrictions on its use. Across domains on the ELP assessment, one to two states allowed the use of a Screen Reader, one state policy consistently allowed it with implications for scoring, and one to three states prohibited its use. On content assessments, only eight states addressed this accommodation, with one state policy prohibiting it (Christensen et al., 2011). Other states allowed the use of a Screen Reader in certain circumstances or with implications for scoring various domains of the content assessment. In the previous ELP report, this accommodation generally was not addressed in state policies.

Policy documents in one state included descriptions of situations in which the accommodation was allowed and prohibited, which varied by assessment domain (Albus & Thurlow, 2007). As state testing practices move toward the computer-based ELP assessment format, this accommodation may be increasingly addressed.

Braille

There were a handful of states with conflicting policies on the use of Braille for ELLs' responses on the ELP assessment. The Braille accommodation was prohibited by 25 states for the Writing domain only, four states allowed it to be used across domains, and one state allowed it to be used in certain circumstances on the ELP assessment. In contrast, 39 states allowed Braille on content assessments, and no state policy prohibited it (Christensen et al., 2011). In the previous ELP report, three states allowed Braille across domains, and seven states prohibited it for one or more domains (Albus & Thurlow, 2007). Policies in six of the states that prohibited it did so for Writing specifically. When comparing recent accommodation policies with those reported in Albus & Thurlow (2007), it appears that states are trending towards prohibiting the Braille accommodation on the Writing domain of the ELP assessment.

Magnification Equipment

There were 38 to 39 states that allowed Magnification Equipment across domains. In comparison, 48 states allowed this accommodation for content assessments (Christensen et al., 2011). This high number appears to indicate that states may consider the accommodation best practice on content assessments. In a previous report on accommodations on ELP assessments, policies in 15 states allowed Magnification Equipment for all domains; one state policy prohibited it. More state policies explicitly allow Magnification Equipment than in previous ELP assessment policies.

Administration Guidelines

Only five states provided guidelines for readers in their accommodation policies for the ELP assessment. This is concerning given that up to 38 states allowed the use of a Read Aloud accommodation on at least one assessment domain. Some consortium states may not have had the same documents available on their websites as other states within their consortia. Therefore, the number of states with guidelines for readers could be higher than that reflected in this report.

Accommodations on Computer-based ELP Assessments

Though more states are moving toward delivering ELP assessments on computers, very little information was available on accommodations for those assessments. States with information on accommodations for computer-based assessments typically allowed the use of Large Print,

Read Aloud Directions, Read Aloud Questions, and Magnification Equipment on at least one assessment domain. Braille and Braillers were not allowed on computer-based ELP assessments by states with policies addressing these accommodations, and the one state that mentioned the Screen Reader accommodation noted that it was not available. It is expected that more information will be made available on accommodations for computer-based ELP assessments in the future.

Conclusion

State policies on the participation and accommodation of students with disabilities on ELP assessments have continued to evolve. In general, more states have developed policies to address participation and specific accommodations over time. These policies are more easily accessible now than in the past. In addition, states have continued to adjust policies to meet the needs of small populations of students with unique needs. One such population is ELLs who are Blind/VI. Including ELLs who are Blind/VI in all domains of the ELP assessment has been an important consideration for states.

In most cases, ELLs who are Blind/VI participate in all domains of an ELP assessment (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking) either with or without accommodations. In addition, there may be state policies available that govern other ways of participating in an ELP assessment in part or as a whole. For students who are Blind/VI, participating in the Reading and Writing assessments may be challenging in states that have limited accommodations available for receptive and expressive language (i.e., computer-delivered assessment that does not allow for the use of braille). The review of policies in this report indicates that states are making progress in ensuring that ELLs who are Blind/VI can access test content. Still, more work can be done to address the participation needs of ELLs who are Blind/VI on the ELP assessment, especially with respect to test domains that may be challenging for this population (i.e., Reading and Writing).

States are also making progress in determining which accommodations can be used by ELLs who are Blind/VI on the ELP assessment, though this information is not provided by every state for every test domain. As policies continue to evolve, it is important that states provide clarity on accommodation use, including information on which accommodations can be used on which portions or domains of an assessment.

Many accommodations are currently available to ELLs who are Blind/VI on ELP assessments, and in some cases states agree on which accommodations are allowed. For example, Large Print and Magnification Equipment accommodations were generally addressed by states in policy documents, and their use was generally allowed on ELP assessments. Other accommodations addressed in state policies may require more clarity. For example, although most states ($n=38-40$) allowed Braille on all four domains of the ELP assessment, more research and expert judgment is needed with regard to the use of Braille for maintaining the accessibility and validity of English

language proficiency assessments. In addition, the role of Braille as an access tool for each of the four domains on the ELP assessment should also be addressed through research. Some states have clear policies about how proficient an ELL should be in using braille before this access tool can be used as a testing accommodation. These guidelines may be helpful in other states as well, though it is important to base these guidelines on established research. Furthermore, with regard to braille, states may need to be aware of a student's use of braille in other languages. For example, an ELL may be proficient in braille, but not English braille. States should develop policies that regulate the use of braille in other languages and the availability of this tool for any part of the assessment.

State policies on other accommodations for ELP assessments are also in flux. The use of the Read Aloud accommodation for Directions is limited on this assessment, as is the Screen Reader accommodation. In developing accommodation policies for Blind/VI students on ELP assessments, it is important for states to consider the construct being measured, so that the appropriate accommodations are recommended. For example, the accommodations recommended when the construct of interest is students' ability to access printed text would likely be different from those recommended when the construct of interest is demonstrated understanding of text. As ELLs who are Blind/VI move into college- and career-ready settings, they will continue to make use of accommodations in order to access print materials in English. Introducing students to appropriate accommodations will enable them to become familiar with the accommodation so they can demonstrate what they know and can do on assessments.

Although most states ($n=41$) provided guidelines for administering accommodations, these documents often omitted information with regard to accommodations used by Blind/VI students. This omission was especially apparent with reference to the Read Aloud accommodation. Up to 31 states allowed Read Aloud Questions, and eight states allowed Read Aloud Directions, yet only five states provided guidelines for readers. In order for students' assessment scores to be valid, accommodations must be chosen and implemented correctly. It is crucial that guidelines be provided for educators who administer accommodations to students. State documents containing this information should be updated to include comprehensive guidelines for the use of accommodations, especially those with a human component such as Read Aloud.

Finally, though few states in this analysis used computer-delivered assessments exclusively, it is important to note that technology is increasingly used to administer assessments. As state policies and practices shift to computer-based assessments, it is important that education specialists consider how the technology impacts accommodation policies (NCEO, 2011). For example, Braille was not available as an accommodation in one state because the ELP assessment was delivered exclusively on the computer. Without accommodations such as Braille, some students may not be able to participate in certain test domains. States should consider consequences such as these when developing technology-rich assessments.

Students who are Blind/VI comprise a small portion of the population of ELLs with disabilities in most states. Nonetheless, their unique needs are ones that should be addressed directly in state participation and accommodations policies for ELP assessments. The results presented by Christensen et al. (2013) demonstrated that states continue to make progress in developing clear policies for participation and accommodation of ELLs with disabilities on ELP assessments. Additional information presented in this report and the companion report on ELLs who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing (Christensen et al., 2014) suggests that states are also refining participation and accommodation policies with respect to the needs of special populations, yet there is still work to be done. It is crucial that state policies and assessments continue to evolve together, so that the knowledge and skills of all students—including ELLs who are Blind/VI—are accurately measured.

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