

Loyola Marymount University
Center for Equity for English Learners (CEEL)

National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB)
Public Hearing: Response to the Technical Advisory Panel on Uniform National Rules
for NAEP Testing of English Language Learners

LAUSD Board Room, Monday, October 19, 2009

Summary of Oral Testimony

Presented by: Elvira G. Armas, Ed.D., Associate Director, CEEL

Given that the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) policy, procedures, and reports are used widely by educators, researchers, politicians, and others in our nation, and as a comparative tool across nations, attention to the precedent set for selecting, testing, and reporting progress of English language learners (ELLs) is paramount.

The guidelines set forth by the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) should reflect best practices in assessment and be informed by research on language and literacy acquisition. An emphasis on what the NAEP is intended to accomplish and whom it informs is critical. Furthermore, the testing and reporting process should focus on ensuring that valid data sources are collected and reported to the nation in a comprehensible manner so as to allow for conversations that link assessment results to district and school reform efforts. Ultimately, these conversations should serve to create pre-service and in-service programs for educators and school leaders that refine what is done for students who come to school with the gift of another language and are apprentices of the English language (English language learners).

Parents who have spoken here today delivered this same message in a very poignant manner. We as educators are ultimately collecting and reporting data that will give all of our nation's citizens a "report card" of how our schools are serving students, including our increasing population of English language learners. Our Center – CEEL – was a collaborator with the LAUSD A+ Summit, a convening of educators, researchers, politicians, parents, educational leaders, administrators, paraprofessionals, and others to examine issues around our work with English language learners and standard English learners. Part of our involvement in this summit included the opportunity to survey and interview parent leadership groups of parents of ELLs and SELs. Overwhelmingly, parents expressed a desire for clearer reports and language around issues of assessment and progress for English learners. They recognized the need for action based on achievement data and identified the importance of building district, administrator, and teacher capacity to more effectively educate our English learners. How will NAEPs testing and reporting policies respond to parents' voices?

I offer some comments about the recommendations presented by the panel. First, with regard to who should be tested, the recommendation is that attention be given to consistency across states, as this is critical for establishing a reliable data source. As stated by other colleagues in this public hearing, there are currently inconsistencies across states as to when English language learners are tested. NAGB has the potential to review and recommend states' policies that are exemplary for valid and reliable psychometric measures of English learners' abilities.

Guidelines must be established that account for and acknowledge the varied population of English learners in this country. For too long, we have approached this group of students as a single entity. Attention must be given to the proportion of English learners that are "long-term" and have been in our schools for 7 or more years and have not reached a level of proficiency to redesignate as fluent English proficient – RFEP. This population is different from those who are newcomers, whether they come with formal instruction in their primary language or are still developing literacy in their primary language. Until we are clear about "Who our English learners are", we can not set forth policy about who should be tested and what percentage of the overall ELL population and/or school population should be tested.

NAGB representatives posed several questions during this hearing regarding "How we should test ELLs". In response to this, I contend that many of the recommendations put forth in this document are essential components for inclusion in the Uniform Rules to be established as a result of this process. Linguistic accommodations, including the establishment of test items using plain language, are key to supporting English language learners. Should the Reading and Writing portion of the NAEP be conducted only in English, without modification? This needs to be examined through several lenses. First, it should be noted that these assessments are based on English Language Arts (ELA) standards measuring proficiency for students who are fluent English speakers. We must be cognizant of ELLs' level of English proficiency in order to determine whether this assessment is valid. Additionally, we must examine **which** ELA standards are assessed and **how** they correlate to the English Language Development (ELD) standards at the respective ELD proficiency levels. We cannot responsibly report results for ELLs on the reading or writing section if the measure is not adequately assessing students at their proficiency level in English. We should instead identify a parallel measure that reports on the students' proficiency in his/her primary language, particularly if he/she is receiving instruction in that language. As an example, California has developed the Spanish Test of Standards (STS), which offers a valid measure of student progress toward Language Arts standards and provides an opportunity to highlight our English Learners' bilingual abilities. It is our obligation to report on the full range of language and literacy abilities of our ELLs. Here is an opportunity to highlight the assets ELLs bring to our schools and our nation. We urge NAGB to emerge as leaders in acknowledging our students' linguistic diversity and establishing our nation as one that values bilingualism and biliteracy.