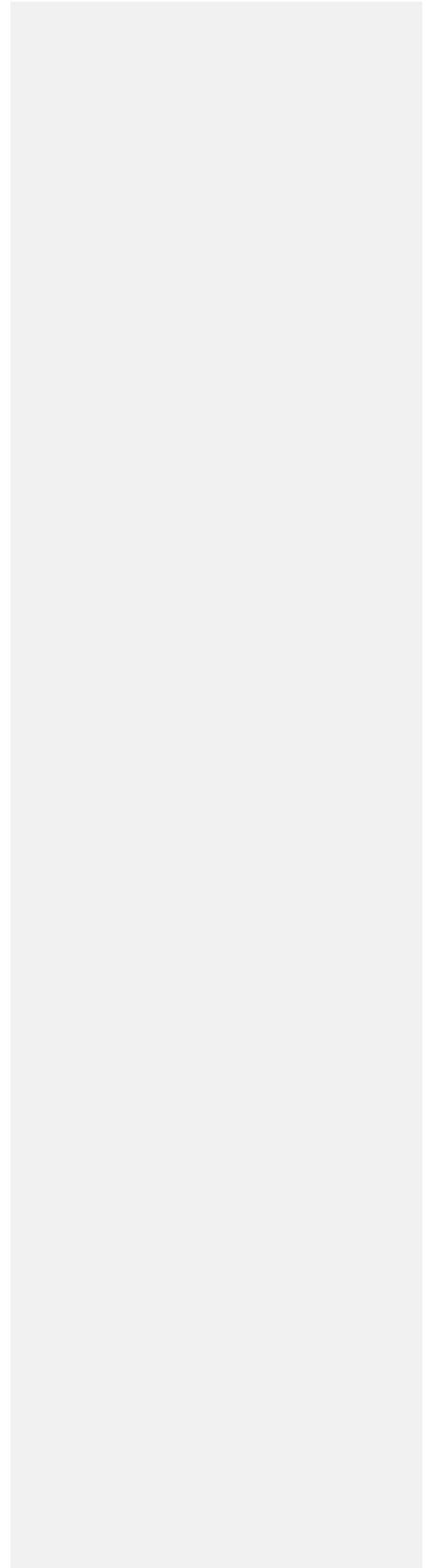


Running head: LOW TEST SCORES, ELLS, AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

Low Test Scores, English Language Learners, School Success



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Abstract

Under No Child Left Behind high stakes testing is being used to determine which schools are making adequate yearly progress (AYP). It has been a challenging task for school districts that have a large English Language Learner (ELL) enrollment to meet the AYP. First the factors for low scores of ELLs who come from poverty will be examined, and how it is unrealistic and detrimental to require these school districts to make AYP. Second the appropriateness of accommodations for ELLs in high stakes assessments (ex. NECAP) will be questioned. Third it questions the ability of states to provide alternate assessments or other appropriate actions for ELLS in lieu of taking high stakes assessments.

Low Test Scores, English Language Learners, and School Success

~~No Child Left Behind~~

The No Child Left Behind Act was passed in January of 2002 and was put into place in support of standards based education with an emphasis on setting measurable goals for children. States are required implement “high stakes” testing and use the results to make major decisions such as funding for adequate yearly progress. Lack of adequate yearly progress can result in punitive measures being taken against states, districts, and schools. According to PL -107-110 (reference), an act to close such achievement gaps, such actions can include the school district implementing choice for parents, replacement of staff, replacement of curriculum, extending school day, restructuring internal organization of school/district, replace principal or to the extreme: a state takeover.

Every child is required to take part in their state’s annual assessments. English language learners are no exception. According to PL107-110 State agencies, school districts, and schools must ensure that ELL students develop English proficiency based on state expectations, and meet the same academic content and achievement standards that all children are expected to meet. ELL students must also be administered reading assessments using tests written in English to any student who has attended school in the United States for 3 or more consecutive years. States must also test at least 95% of those students identified as ELL in reading/language arts and math, and science. And the state must report the tests scores of ELL students as one of the subgroups to be disaggregated, and as part of the state, district and school test scores for all of the students.

Comment [YH1]: You need to put the publishing year.

Adequate Yearly Progress and ELLs

In the years since NCLB became law, test scores have reportedly risen in many areas. However, schools who continue to rank among the lowest are usually found in the high poverty, high minority, school districts. These are also the schools with the largest ELL population. This problem exists not only in my district but throughout the country. According to Fry (2008), public schools where ELL test takers are concentrated have greater proportion of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch, have higher student teacher ratios, are more likely to be city schools, and are more likely to be designated Title I schools.

Comment [YH2]: Good statement!

ELL students are disproportionately low-income and more likely to attend lower-resourced schools, states Neill (2005) with socio-economic status being the strongest predictor of test scores, overall. 70% of our ELL students are taught in 10% of our schools. The school that I currently work in fits this description exactly. We have more than 70% minority students attending our school. We have the highest number of ELL children in the district as we are one of only two elementary schools who can service them. We also have most of the self-contained special education classes and the highest number of resource students in the district. I call it segregation but the district calls it a neighborhood school.

Comment [YH3]: Strong statement! How does such a school setting negatively affect students' achievement?

During the hearing before the Subcommittee on Early Childhood Elementary and Secondary Education of the Committee on Education and Labor (2007), Peter Zamora, Hispanic Education Coalition, stated that over three-quarters of ELLs are Spanish-speaking, and over two-thirds come from low-income families. ELL students' academic

performance is well below that of their peers in nearly every measure of academic performance, and they drop out of school at higher rates than any other student subgroup.

Our school struggles to make adequately performing each year. Several years ago we were considered underperforming but we were able to increase test scores by working hard with students and making changes in teaching and curriculum. Our district does not seem to understand the problem. Our ELL children, our high poverty children, and most of our minority children are all attending the same elementary school when there are three in the district. The other elementary schools in the middle and upper class areas are meeting or exceeding standards. Fry (2008) suggests that ELL math achievement is positively associated with schools that have larger numbers of white students. This implies a correlation to low achievement and segregation.

Comment [YH4]: What are the possible causes of minority students' low achievement?

Accommodating English Language Learners

It takes an average person seven years to become proficient in a language. Yet we are asking our ELL students to take a test almost immediately upon entering our country and then using those scores to grade our schools. This makes no sense. Under NCLB there are accommodations for these students. However the accommodations are left up to individual states and are vague at best. In Rhode Island accommodations for ELL students on the New England Common Assessment Program are as follows: ELL students may use word-to-word translations as linguistic accommodation support, mathematics test items may be read aloud to the student, students may read aloud to themselves (if bundled with an individual test setting), and test directions may be translated into primary language. The underlining of key information in written directions and dictation/ scribing of reading and math test responses is also permitted.

These testing accommodations are similar to those given to every child with the exception of scribing and underlining of directions.

Every state accommodates ELL students in their testing programs. Different ones include breaks, dictionaries, bilingual versions of the tests, and test taker response in native language. Most accommodations used for ELL students are the same that are used for students with disabilities. Because ELL students have a more unique linguistic and cultural situation, many of these accommodations are not as helpful for them as they are for students with disabilities. The testing situation can be extremely frustrating and emotional for them. Unfortunately, according to Young and King (2008), the research literature currently provides limited and mixed information regarding the effectiveness of accommodations.

School Success or Failure

Many urban schools are considered low performing. We know that about two thirds of our ELL students currently live in poverty. Despite the government allowing teachers the few accommodations on high stakes testing, it is not enough. These students are failing because they are not prepared to take the tests. This impacts the schools, the teachers, the students. Right now the scores of ELL students are not counted until they are in the country for 12 months. This still does not address the issue of language proficiency or the fact that many of our ELLs are born here.

Low performing schools are punished with severe penalties under NCLB. They are stuck in a vicious circle: students don't test well, test scores are low, schools lose funding, teachers are blamed and or driven out, morale goes down, more tests, more penalties, etc. In the meantime, there are teachers who really care about the students and

students who are trying their best every day and making solid gains and the government doesn't notice.

Either the scores of ELL students who are not proficient in English should not be counted into a schools performance evaluation based on the accommodations currently in place or they should be exempt from taking the tests. These assessments results are used in positive way but also in negative way such as firing staff, closing schools, and raising public awareness and negativity towards low performing schools.

Excluding Giving ELLs An Extension for High-Stake Testing

Wright (2007) states, negative educational and emotional consequences for ELL students can be so severe that some advocates for ELLs have called for excluding them from testing until they are proficient in English. Since most states use a single test to base school performance on I would agree with Wright. 19 states, however, currently allow alternative assessments for one or more components of their tests. These range from alternate portfolios in literacy and math in Arkansas, a test of emerging academic English in Minnesota for students who have been in the U.S. three years or less, alternate assessments which could include native language achievement tests, performance assessment and/or writing samples and other classroom work from the student in New Jersey, and alternate assessments which are standards-based and locally developed in Wisconsin. Having witnessed the NECAP exam this year, I observed the fear and anxiety that was placed upon the students by the principal. I also felt for my own children and had to reassure them daily that I would be proud of them no matter what their final score was on the test.

I believe that a more comprehensive measure of student achievement would benefit everyone in Rhode Island. Multiple measures, according to Wright (2007), of

student achievement such as portfolios, samples of student work, and classroom-based assessments should also be included in an accountability system, as together they are far more likely to offer an accurate picture of what an ELL student knows and is able to do. ASPIRA, a national Hispanic organization dedicated exclusively to developing the educational and leadership capacity of Hispanic youth, opposes the measure to exclude any ELL or Special Education students from accountability testing. ASPIRA is concerned that excluding ELL students from regular assessments to ascertain the school's yearly progress will lead to ELL students being segregated and not tested, outside of the school accountability system and therefore underserved by the school. However ASPIRA does agree that other –non-accountability- measures should be used to guide services to these students, such as using academic growth of individual students to determine adequate yearly progress.

Conclusion

According to Equal Educational Opportunities Act, 1974 Castaneda vs. Pickard, segregating ELL children is legal as long as the degree of segregation in the program is necessary to achieve the program's educational goal. In many schools across the country, segregation had begun happening again due to the government limiting resources, a return to neighborhood schools, and groups of immigrants settling in specific sections of the United States. ELL children are more likely to live in low socio-economic areas and attend low performing schools. Studies have shown that ELL students consistently underperform on high stakes testing.

Some may say that excluding ELLs from high stakes testing allows schools to ignore their needs. This would not be ignoring their needs but would be accommodating them on a more personal level. Using a variety of testing materials to show academic growth and achievement over time would provide a fair way of assessing them.

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Appendix D— Appropriateness of Accommodations, 2007-08 NECAP Science Technical Report. Retrieved from <http://www.ride.ri.gov/assessment/>

Young, J and King, T (2008) Testing Accommodations for English Language Learners: A Review of State and District Policies. The College Board, New York
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Rubric for the Assessment Issues Research Paper [35 Points; 7 points each]

CEC 8: Assessment; CEC 9 Professional and Ethical Practice; Knowledge: Domain-Specific Knowledge; TESOL Standard 4.a, 5.a.

	CEC Standards	Approaches Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard
Identification of Issues in the Assessment of ELL Students with Disabilities	Understands various issues of assessment for students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. CEC 8: ICC8K1, ICC8K2, ICC8K3, ICC8K4, ICC8K5, GS8K1, GS8K2, GS8K3, GS8K4, ICC8S6	Did not identify two relevant issues, or the issues identified are not specific to culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities	Adequately identified two relevant issues in the assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities	Identified two highly relevant and critical issues in the assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse learners with disabilities 7
Quality of Research Conducted	Understands assessment issues that impact ELL students. Pursues opportunities to grow in his/her knowledge of the field through well-conducted academic research. CEC 9: ICC9K1, ICC9S8	The research conducted was limited or lacking in currency, depth, or breath.	The research conducted was adequate to discuss the two assessment issues selected and the candidate cited a satisfactory number of relevant sources.	The research conducted was extensive for each topic and the candidate utilized an excellent variety of sources. 6
Discussion of the Issues from a National, Regional, and Local Perspective	Demonstrates understanding of the various issues of assessment for special education testing and the various ways that tests can be biased and therefore invalid measures of what ELL students know and can do. CEC 8: ICC8K1, ICC8K2, ICC8K3, ICC8K4, ICC8K5, GS8K1, GS8K2, GS8K3, GS8K4, ICC8S6	The candidate provided some discussion of each issue but failed to discuss the issue from both a national and regional/local perspective. Some citations are relevant; however the citations are lacking in variety, relevance or completeness.	The candidate satisfactorily discussed each issue from a national perspective and linked the national picture on the issue to local or regional conditions. Relevant and complete citations are provided for each issue. 5	The candidate provided a rich and highly detailed discussion of the issue from a national, regional and local perspective. The citations are well done. They are well selected, complete, and correctly formulated according to APA format.

	CEC Standards	Approaches Standard	Meets Standard	Exceeds Standard
Solutions Provided to Resolve the Two Identified Issues	Advocates and serves as an educational resource for other professionals, students and families in their schools and communities. Provides alternatives to biased and limiting assessment practices. CEC 9: GC9K1	The candidate failed to provide solutions for the two issues as culled from the research conducted, local best practices or his/her own recommendations.	The candidate provided a satisfactory range of suggestions to resolve each issue as culled from research, local best practices and his/her own proposed recommendations. 5	The candidate provides a range of highly detailed and well-formulated solutions to the assessment issues discussed.
Professional Presentation of Information	Presents information in a highly professional manner that will serve the local educational community; Writing is a model of English academic proficiency. CEC 9: ICC9S8	The candidate demonstrates some level of academic proficiency in English but deficiencies are noted. Required page length not met or the paper is not well constructed within the page limit set.	Candidate demonstrates a satisfactory level of academic proficiency in English. Required page length is met and the paper is organized and written in a satisfactory manner.	The candidate demonstrates superior proficiency in English for academic purposes. The candidate maintains the required page length while providing a succinct and expertly-organized paper. 6

Name _____

Date 12/2010

Score 29