

Accommodations and Options for Testing ELLs

"It is easy to see what a disadvantage English language learners are operating from without viable testing accommodations. By not intervening, states are failing to meet their legal obligation under *Castañeda v. Pickard* to educate language-minority students and are promoting inequitable environments in the nation's schools" (Hakuta, April 2004: Testimony before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights).

Testing Accommodations

Teachers should know that there are appropriate accommodations to improve the validity of tests for English language learners. These are typically classified as modifications of the test and modifications of the test procedure.

Test-related accommodations:

- Assess in the native language.
- Provide linguistic modifications of test directions.
- Provide glossaries of key test terms in English.
- Provide glossaries in the native language.
- Give additional example items.

Procedure-related accommodations:

- Give students additional time to complete the test.
- Administer the test in a familiar and comfortable environment.
- Repeat and clarify meanings of words not related to the content being assessed on tests.
- Give oral directions in the native language.
- Allow the use of dictionaries.
- Use multiple, short test periods.
- Test in small groups or in a separate classroom.

Options for Testing ELLs

Students may be assessed through means other than normative standardized tests. Alternative assessment methodologies fall in the realm of informal formative assessments. Below are listed some of the forms that have been used successfully by educators as measures of student knowledge and progress.

- **Portfolios** help to collect students' best work over time and provide information on what students can do. Portfolio guidelines include the clear communication of purpose, directions on how to get started that show examples of model work, and guidelines for completion.
- **Journals** offer an opportunity to establish a dialogue between teacher and student. The exchange allows teachers to provide feedback to students. Journals should follow specific and systematic guidelines similar to those of the portfolio.
- **Conferences** are forms of summative assessment. Conferences are not intended to assess student performance but to allow for a one-on-one interaction where teachers provide guidance and feedback to students on their work.
- **Cooperative test construction** is considered one of the most productive forms of alternative assessment methodologies. The purpose is to involve students in the design of a test. Through the process of reviewing items for the test, students gain valuable knowledge of the content to be assessed.

References

August, D., & Hakuta, K. (Eds.). (1997). *Improving schooling for language-minority children: A research agenda*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.