Multilingual/English Learner Resource Bank

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Identification/Classification/Reclassification Placement Policies

Keywords: assessment, English learners, identification, reclassification, placement policies

What Is the Topic

In K-12 education, assessment refers to the process of gathering information about students' learning progress, skills, knowledge, and abilities. The Oregon Department of Education defines assessment as the systematic gathering of data with the purpose of appraising and evaluating children's social, physical, emotional, and intellectual development. In Oregon, the Assessment Team is focused on creating a comprehensive assessment system. The term English Learners (ELs) in this brief refers to students who are working towards proficiency in English and need instructional support to fully access the academic content in their class work (Ballantyne, et al., 2008). Assessment for English learners aims to ensure fairness, accuracy, and effectiveness in evaluating their language proficiency and academic progress. Additionally, assessments provide EL students access to grade-level academic content and English language instruction that are appropriate for advancing their language proficiency and academic achievement. An equity approach in the assessment of English learners aims to recognize the diversity of this group to avoid unnecessary segregation (p.22). Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the need for multiple ways of measuring ELs' varying abilities and learning potentials, and the role of learners as co-participants in the assessment process.

Placement policies, encompassing identification, classification (p.10), and reclassification (p.10), are foundational as they enable educators, school staff, and school leaders to accurately identify ways for tailored interventions and support mechanisms aimed at facilitating language acquisition and academic achievement, as stated in Title III. These policies dictate the distribution of ELs into language programs tailored to their proficiency levels, playing a significant role in shaping their educational trajectories and influencing their access to academic content and language development opportunities. We acknowledge that many educators, school staff, and school leaders are already familiar with some strategies or techniques for making assessments that effectively address the needs of English learners (ELs). We

hope that this brief helps to expand that knowledge and support the ongoing collective efforts to provide equitable assessment practices.

What Is the Evidence Base

Educators, school leaders and researchers alike, strive to build policies and practices on data and evidence, especially on academic achievement scores. When assessment scores are inaccurate for specific student populations or when scores are inappropriately used, even data-driven decisions may be misinformed (Baker, Johnson, & Viveros, 2024;Gutiérrez & Orellana, 2006). Studies examining academic achievement of English learners (ELs) have historically shown disparities when compared with their non-EL peers. However, a growing body of research highlights the potential of English learners to make academic progress at the same rate as their peers, when assessment practices are tailored to address the cultural backgrounds and needs of ELs. Equitable assessment aims to disrupt deficit-based thinking about ELs ability to succeed academically and instead fostering an asset-based approach (Gandara & Merino, 1993; Johnson & Barker, 2021).

Robinson et al., (2016) offer a set of research-based policy recommendations regarding equitable assessment practices for all students, with particular emphasis on ELs:

- Establish academic achievement expectations that take into account students' English proficiency and time in the school system.
- If using value-added methods for educator or school accountability, consider the consequences of using invalid and unreliable assessments of ELs, and adjust accordingly, either by not including ELs' scores or by improving validity and reliability through accommodations.
- Enact policies that allow for a wide range of accommodations because no single accommodation works for all students.
- Assess students to determine the most appropriate accommodation(s) and provide them.

The models and frameworks below, provide knowledge and perspectives for educators and school leaders to promote more equity-centered assessment practices and thus better support English learners and their academic success.

Framework 1: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP):this is a research-based instructional framework that consists of eight interrelated components (Figure 1). These components are designed to support English learners' access to grade-level content while simultaneously developing their English language proficiency. This model includes specific instructional strategies and techniques that teachers can use to make content comprehensible and scaffold learning for English learners. Numerous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of SIOP in improving academic outcomes for English learners across various content areas and grade levels. In addition, educators often report that SIOP-based teaching benefits all students, not just those who are learning English as an additional language.

Figure 1. Components of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

- August & Shanahan (2006) used the SIOP model to investigate the impact of systematic language development on English learners' academic success, emphasizing the importance of vocabulary knowledge in improving reading comprehension and overall academic achievement. The authors found that there is a strong relationship between oral language proficiency and literacy, which makes development of oral language a priority showing that this approach can advance ELs' proficiency and improve their knowledge and use of English.
- In the study "Implementing The SIOP Model To Support ELs," the author explored how the SIOP model was used to support teachers in delivering subject-specific content while fostering language development. Results showed a positive impact on student learning. Most teachers found success with components of the SIOP Model and have begun incorporating them into their planning. Improved reading scores in grades 1 and 2 were noted in NWEA MAP results, demonstrating progress toward strategic goals through focused Professional Learning Communities.
- In this study, the authors introduced the SIOP model to measure its effectiveness in delivering consistent, high-quality teaching to L2 students, emphasizing both subject area content acquisition and language development. This study addressed various student settings, including immigrant students with varying literacy levels, bilingual students learning content through another language, and English as a foreign language learners studying professional content through English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. The authors reported significant improvements in achieving learning outcomes for ELs across all three settings through the implementation of this SIOP model.

Framework 2: Response to Intervention (RTI): This is a multi-tiered system (Figure 2) of support that helps educators identify the needs of all students as they develop more culturally and linguistically responsive educational systems. It is also a means by which school systems systematically provide

interventions when they are needed to prevent students from failing as it is occurring and without waiting for a special education evaluation. For ELs, RTI holds promise for improving student academic outcomes. The focus on preventing reading difficulties offers the possibility of delivering Tier 1 instruction that is high quality and appropriate for ELs, providing early intervention, and reducing the number of unwarranted referrals to special education (Haager, 2007). A fundamental tenet of Response to Intervention (RTI) is its shift from a deficit-oriented perspective to an asset-based approach. Based on this framework, Echevarria and Hasbrouck, (2009) suggest that the following practices (p.4) are essential for providing meaningful and understandable lessons for English learners.
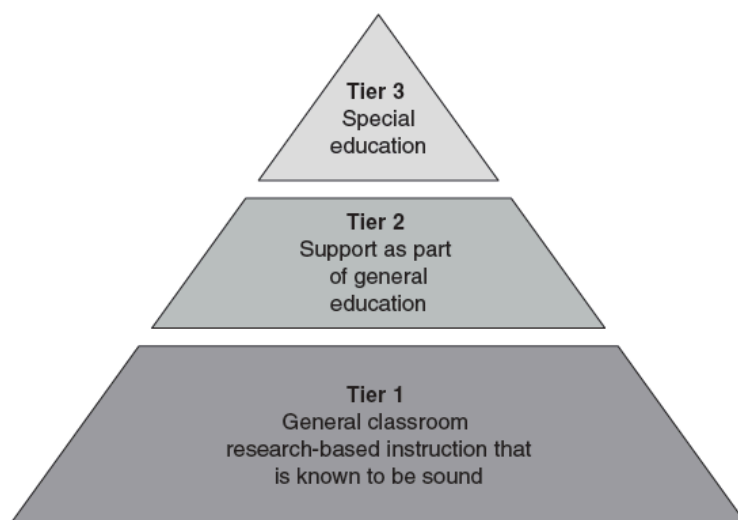

Figure 2. Three-tiered System of the Response to Intervention Framework

- Orosco (2007) investigated the implementation of sociocultural instruction and evidence-based literacy practices within an RTI framework for Latino English learners through classroom observations. The study found that educators can effectively integrate sociocultural experiences with literacy instruction, fostering collaborative comprehension and validating students' backgrounds and increased engagement and improved academic outcomes for the students.
- The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between English Learners' (ELs) reading achievement scores and their participation in Response to Intervention (RTI). The results indicated that RTI was a beneficial practice for ELs, suggesting its potential effectiveness in improving their academic outcomes. The authors suggest that educators, administrators, and school leaders can consider the data presented in this study, along with the interpretation of the results, to develop or implement an RTI model tailored to benefit the ELs population in schools.
- Linan-Thompson, et al., (2006) examined the effectiveness of Response to Intervention (RTI) for English language learners identified as at risk for reading difficulties in first grade. Students were assessed at the end of first grade and again at the end of second grade. Criteria were established to determine adequate RTI at the end of both first and second grades. The findings revealed that a greater number of students who participated in the first-grade intervention,

whether in Spanish or English, met the RTI standards compared to those who did not participate, and this trend persisted through the end of second grade.

Summary

Review of relevant literature: Theoretical basis	Review of relevant literature: Support of identified research and practice	Empirical evidence on how it serves students and promotes systemic change
Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP): Research-based instructional framework designed to support ELs' access to grade-level content while simultaneously developing their English language proficiency.	- For educators, the goal is to help students gain important experience with key grade-level content and skills as they progress toward fluency in academic English. - Students know what they are expected to learn and/or be able to do by the end of each lesson.	- Various studies show that SIOP instruction is making a positive learning difference for all students, including ELs. Principles of this framework indicate that no one is disadvantaged by SIOP instruction; rather, the focus on academic literacy and scaffolded instruction helps all students learn academic English and grade-level, content curricula effectively.
Response to Intervention (RTI): Multi-tiered system of support that helps educators identify the needs of all students as they develop more culturally and linguistically responsive educational practices.	Fundamental tenets: - Shift from a deficit-oriented perspective to an asset-based approach. - Most academic barriers can be prevented with early identification of need followed by immediate intervention.	- Educators can effectively integrate sociocultural experiences with literacy instruction, fostering collaborative comprehension and validating students' backgrounds and increased engagement and improved academic outcomes (Orosco 2007).

Equity Considerations

Understanding the diverse identities within the English learner (EL) population is crucial for developing effective assessment practices and support systems. Kanno and Kangas (2024) highlight the intersectionality of ELs, particularly focusing on the experiences of Black ELs who often experience additional layers of oppression beyond language barriers. In their study, they emphasize the importance of recognizing the intersecting identities of ELs, such as race, and how these intersecting identities influence their educational experiences. Similarly, an article from New America explores the intersectionality of Black English learners in U.S. public schools, shedding light on some of the challenges experienced by this subgroup within the EL population. Regarding demographic

characteristics, there are over 200,000 Black ELs enrolled in grades K-12 across the country, comprising roughly 2.6 percent of the total Black student population. Recent data reveal that Black ELs constitute the fourth largest racial group among ELs, illustrating their significant presence within the EL demographic. Despite this, their racial identity often overshadows other intersecting identities and associated academic needs. For example, Kanno and Kangas (2024) discuss the intersectionality of English learners (ELs), emphasizing how their identities, including race, intersect to shape their experiences. Black ELs, in particular, often contend with multiple layers of oppression beyond language barriers. However, assessment practices may overlook these complexities, failing to account for the unique challenges faced by Black ELs.

Considerations for Local Context: Strategy Selection

As we consider the optimal next steps for supporting educators and school leaders to establish equitable assessment of English learners, a valuable source of information lies in the local context of the district and/or school. In this brief, by local context, we refer to the specific factors within the community that may impact the development and effectiveness of equitable assessment practices. As stated in the Oregon Department of Education's integrated guidance for student success, the needs assessment (Figure 3) should be informed and collaborated on with communities, as well as inform how communities are being engaged more broadly.

Assessment for program placement is essential for identifying the needs of English learners. This process aims to determine if specialized instructional services like sheltered instruction, ESL, or bilingual education are necessary, as required by federal and state laws. Understanding the language and academic needs of ELs is crucial for developing appropriate instructional programs. Without proper assessment, essential components for language proficiency and academic success may be missed. A thorough assessment should consider factors such as ELs' home language preferences, educational background, English proficiency level, and academic content knowledge in English.

Also, consider answering the following questions as educators and school leaders develop plans to enhance communication with EL families and implement strategies to improve interpretation and translation:
1. How can assessment practices be adjusted to recognize and accommodate the diverse identities within the English learner population, particularly considering factors such as race and cultural background?
2. In what ways can placement policies, including identification, classification, and reclassification procedures, be refined to accurately assess the varying abilities and learning potentials of English learners, while avoiding potential segregation and ensuring equitable access to academic content and language development opportunities?
3. What measures can be implemented to expand educators' and school staff's knowledge of effective assessment strategies to address the needs of English learners (ELs) and ensure ongoing collective efforts to provide equitable assessment practices and support systems?
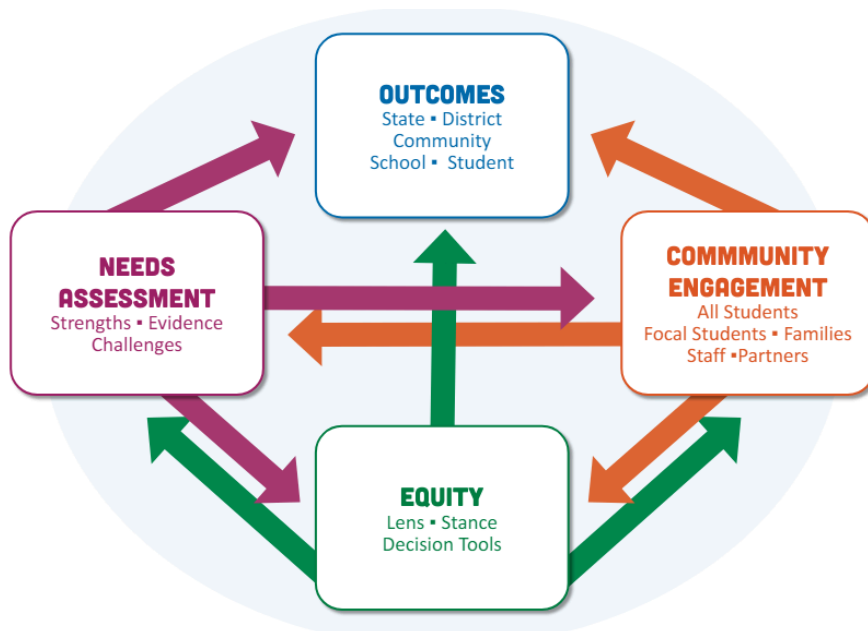
Figure 3. Oregon Department of Education Framework for Equitable Assessment

To better understand the characteristics of the local context in a school or district, it is recommended to consult the Oregon Department of Education English Language Proficiency that contains valuable insights and data that can inform educational planning and decision-making processes. Three local examples of districts utilizing such resources effectively include the English Learner Plans of Woodburn School District, Wilsonville School District, and Central Curry School District.

What Can Educators and School Leaders Do: Strategies for Success

While educators and school leaders are engaging in developing equitable assessment practices, it is important to consider the role families play in this topic. This document offers insights into how to inform and guide families of English learners about assessment. The RAND Education Assessment Finder is an online tool that offers details on assessments targeting K–12 students' interpersonal, intrapersonal, and advanced cognitive skills. This resource enables practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to discover available assessments, their intended measurements, administration methods, impact on students and teachers, and the types of score utilization. Additionally, it includes links to supplementary resources, including guidance to aid practitioners in utilizing assessments proficiently.

Before holding students accountable for meeting educational standards, schools must ensure they meet those standards themselves, allowing students to fully understand what's being tested. Lacelle-Peterson and Rivera (1994) offer dimensions to assess current assessment methods and support English learners (ELs). These dimensions can support in identifying the strategies that best suit the school, community, and district.

1. Cultural and Linguistic Value: Acknowledge and honor the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of ELs. Every student contributes valuable assets to the classroom, encompassing language,

culture, family, and community. ELs should be actively encouraged to draw upon their complete linguistic repertoire, embracing languages other than English.

2. Access to Academic Content: ELs need to have access to grade-level academic content and appropriate English language instruction to advance both their language proficiency and academic achievement.

3. Collective Responsibility: Schools should collectively take responsibility for ELs setting high expectations for EL programs and services. Effective EL supports should be research-aligned and regularly evaluated. Educators and school leaders should receive training in English language development instruction and culturally responsive teaching, with ongoing professional development to refine their practices.

4. Data-Informed Decision Making: Utilize multiple sources of data to inform and continuously refine EL programs, services, instruction, and assessment. Various data points, including attendance, course enrollment, extracurricular participation, graduation rates, achievement scores, language development, and school climate, should be utilized to evaluate programs and enhance opportunities and services for ELs.

The strategies below serve as examples of potential options rather than a definitive set of recommendations. Suitable approaches could support and key in on various factors associated with the school or district, such as the frameworks and strategies to foster equitable assessment practices that are already in place.

Example from the Field
Without proper assessment, essential components for language proficiency and academic success for ELs may be missed. A thorough assessment should consider factors such as ELs' home language preferences, educational background, English proficiency level, and academic content knowledge in English.

Strategy 1: Culturally Responsive Assessment

Primary audience: educators, school staff, and school leaders

Description: Culturally responsive assessment practices aim to integrate students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds into the assessment process, recognizing that culture shapes how individuals learn and express knowledge (Gay, 2010). Culturally responsive assessment involves being student-focused, which calls for student involvement throughout the entire assessment process including the development of learning outcome statements, assessment tool selection/development process, data collection and interpretation (Spinelli, 2008). These practices involve selecting assessment tools and methods that resonate with students' cultural contexts, offering multiple modalities for demonstrating understanding, and providing language support to ensure equitable access (Gay, 2010;Ladson-Billings, 1995).

How to use it?

To implement culturally responsive assessment practices effectively, educators can follow these steps:

● Understand Cultural Diversity: Educators should familiarize themselves with the cultural backgrounds and experiences of EL students to inform assessment design.

● Select Culturally Relevant Tools: Choose assessment methods, such as performance-based tasks or culturally relevant texts, that reflect students' cultural experiences.

● Provide Multiple Modalities: Offer assessment tasks that allow EL students to demonstrate understanding through various means, such as oral presentations or multimedia projects.

● Offer Language Supports: Ensure assessments are accessible by providing language supports, such as bilingual glossaries or translated instructions.

- Encourage Student Engagement: Foster a supportive environment where EL students feel valued and encouraged to participate actively in assessments.

How is it beneficial? Who benefits from it?

EL students benefit from culturally responsive assessment practices as they feel more engaged and motivated to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in familiar contexts. Additionally, educators benefit by gaining a more holistic understanding of EL students' abilities, leading to more accurate assessment outcomes (Ebe, 2010).

How does it support changes in the systems?

This strategy supports changes in the assessment system by promoting equity and inclusivity in the evaluation of EL students. It challenges traditional assessment practices that may overlook or misinterpret the strengths of culturally and linguistically diverse students, leading to more equitable outcomes (Ebe, 2010).

Known or potential cautions? What not to do?

Educators should avoid stereotyping or tokenizing students' cultural backgrounds when designing assessments. It's essential to approach cultural responsiveness with sensitivity and respect, ensuring that assessments are fair, valid, and free from bias.

Strategy 2: Language-Accessible Assessment Design

Primary audience: educators, assessment coordinators, and curriculum developers responsible for creating assessments for English learners (ELs)

Description: Language-accessible assessment design is a comprehensive approach aimed at crafting assessments that effectively cater to the linguistic needs of English learners (ELs). This strategy recognizes that language proficiency significantly impacts ELs' ability to demonstrate their understanding of academic content (August, et al., 2005). It is highly recommendable to consider the involvement of an EL Specialist to provide guidance and amend language or directions as needed in crafting language-accessible assessments (Pitoniak et al., 2005). Educators and school leaders may be unfamiliar with EL teaching strategies or EL classrooms and may overlook the nuances of language accessibility. For instance, what seems clear to a non-EL educator may not effectively cater to the linguistic needs of ELs, as they may struggle to identify familiar vocabulary or lack experience in scaffolding material effectively. Therefore, integrating the expertise of an EL Specialist can greatly enhance the clarity, simplicity, and appropriateness of language used in assessment materials, ensuring they effectively meet the needs of ELs.

How to use it? Suggested guidelines:

- Clear Test Directions: It is essential to design test directions that are straightforward and easy to understand. Complex or ambiguous directions can lead to confusion, especially for ELs who may be navigating language barriers. Clear directions help ensure that all students know what is expected of them, allowing them to focus on demonstrating their knowledge and skills without being hindered by unclear instructions.
- Accessible Vocabulary: Test items should use vocabulary that is widely understood by students and directly related to the construct being assessed. Avoiding unfamiliar terms helps prevent confusion and ensures that the assessment accurately measures students' knowledge and

abilities (Bailey et al., 2007). Providing clear and familiar vocabulary allows ELs to engage with the content effectively, without being hindered by language barriers.

- Simple Sentence Structures: Complex sentence structures can pose challenges for ELs, who may struggle to parse lengthy or convoluted sentences (Pitoniak et al., 2009). By using simpler sentence structures, educators can enhance the accessibility of assessment items, allowing students to focus on demonstrating their understanding of the content rather than grappling with complex language structures (Young, 2008).

How is it beneficial? Who benefits from it?

ELs benefit from assessments that reduce language barriers, allowing them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills more accurately. Educators benefit from obtaining more reliable and meaningful assessment data, facilitating targeted instructional planning and support tailored to the needs of ELs.

How does it support changes in the systems?

By advocating for assessments that are sensitive to language diversity and proficiency levels, language-accessible assessment design contributes to broader systemic changes in education. It promotes equity and inclusivity in the evaluation of ELs, advocating for the integration of language-accessible features in standardized assessments and assessment practices across educational systems (Johnson, Barker, & Viveros Cespedes, 2024).

Known or potential cautions? What not to do?

- Consideration of Cognates: While cognates can sometimes aid comprehension for ELs, it's crucial to be mindful of false cognates that may inadvertently confuse students (Bernhardt, 2005). False cognates, or words that appear similar across languages but have different meanings, can lead to misunderstanding and impact the validity of assessment results. Educators should be cautious when incorporating cognates into assessment items, ensuring that they are accurately understood by students.
- Cultural references and idiomatic expressions: These should be avoided in assessment items to prevent bias and ensure equitable evaluation for all students. Including culturally specific references may inadvertently disadvantage students who are not familiar with the cultural context, compromising the fairness of the assessment.

Implementation Considerations

As we embark on creating a plan and proceeding with implementation, it is useful to consider topic-specific aspects as well as general factors and guiding questions that can increase the likelihood for successful implementation. The Oregon Department of Education offers an integrated needs assessment tool (p.113), that can support and guide educators and school leaders during the process of identifying and implementing strategies. Also, we recommend checking the Oregon Statewide Assessment System which includes multiple, equity-centered resources. Additionally, we also recommend reflecting on Robinson et al., (2016) list of research-based policy recommendations regarding classification and reclassification:

- Acknowledge the varying timeframes required for English proficiency attainment, typically averaging between 4 to 7 years according to research.

- Avoid establishing rigid timelines for English learner (EL) services, recognizing the individualized nature of language acquisition.
- Prioritize pertinent factors like English Language Proficiency (ELP) scores over less relevant ones such as academic test scores when determining classification and reclassification.
- Recognize the potential consequences of reclassification on subsequent student outcomes, emphasizing the importance of informed decision-making.
- Refrain from equating higher reclassification rates with superior service provision; premature removal of services may adversely affect graduation rates, necessitating careful evaluation of reclassification criteria and procedures.

Local Context

Consider answering the following questions to determine how the local contexts of the school, district, and community may impact the implementation of the strategies and approaches discussed in this brief:

- To what extent is the implementation plan sensitive to the unique local challenges and opportunities in promoting equitable identification, classification, and reclassification?
- What measures are in place to ensure the sustainability of the plan over time within schools and across the district?
- How consistent is the implementation of the plan—both within individual schools and across the entire district?
- To access more information and support, we recommend checking the Oregon Department of Education Office of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment.

Consider as well:

- Geographical Factors:How do the location and size of the district/school impact the practical aspects of plan implementation?
- Learning Mode: What considerations are needed based on the learning mode (in person/remote/hybrid/other) prevalent in the local context?
- Duration: How long is the plan designed to last, and what measures are in place for its continuous effectiveness?
- Reliability: Is the implementation plan reliable and realistic given the local context, and what factors contribute to its sustainability?

Implementation Plan and Process

The following questions can further enhance clarity and provide practical guidance for educators and school leaders as they navigate the implementation process and monitor progress effectively:

- **What is our capacity for implementation?**

Educators and school leaders' capacity for implementation relies on their understanding of the local context, including the specific needs of English learners (ELs) in their district or school. We recommend to gauge school staff's familiarity with assessment practices tailored to ELs and ensure that they have

the necessary training and resources to implement equitable assessment strategies effectively (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016). This might involve conducting a needs assessment in collaboration with the community to identify gaps in knowledge and resources.

- **How are families involved in the implementation of the plan?**

Family engagement in assessment is crucial for creating a supportive and inclusive environment for English learners. Family engagement refers to the active participation of families in their children's education, including engagement in decision-making processes, attending school events, and supporting learning at home (Epstein, 2001). In the context of implementing assessment plans for English learners, family involvement includes opportunities for families to engage in meetings, workshops, and communication channels that facilitate dialogue between educators, school staff, and school leaders. The input of EL families is crucial in understanding the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of EL students, which can positively inform assessment design and ensure that the assessment process is culturally and linguistically responsive.

- **How will we know if the implementation is successful?**

Measuring the success of implementation can be conducted by monitoring various indicators, including EL students' academic progress, engagement in assessments, feedback from stakeholders, and the alignment of assessment outcomes with learning goals. Additionally, we recommend assessing the extent to which assessment practices recognize and accommodate the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of ELs, ensuring that placement policies are refined to accurately assess the varying abilities and learning potentials of ELs while avoiding potential segregation.

- **What resources do we need to implement the program, plan, or strategies?**

Although funding is generally not required in the implementation of the strategies offered in this brief, we suggest educators and school leaders explore what funding opportunities may be available that could be useful. If funding is limited in the school district, educators and school leaders may consider exploring outside resources, such as Oregon's Department of Education grants and funding opportunities. Another organization that tends to provide funding is the Spencer Foundation. Also consider checking the U.S Department of Education Financial Transparency and Reporting Readiness Assessment Tool.

- **Are accessibility supports in place?**

Ensuring that accessibility supports are in place involves a collaborative effort between educators, assessment coordinators, curriculum developers, and English Learner (EL) specialists. EL specialists play a crucial role in refining language-accessible assessments, leveraging their expertise to ensure that assessment materials are comprehensible and culturally sensitive for EL students (Pitoniak et al., 2005). These specialists provide guidance and amend language or directions as needed to craft assessments that effectively cater to the linguistic needs of ELs (Pitoniak et al., 2005). By integrating the expertise of EL specialists, educators and curriculum developers can enhance the clarity, simplicity, and appropriateness of language used in assessment materials, ensuring they effectively meet the needs of ELs.

Learn More

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