EDITOR’S NOTE
The results are in. This Spotlight will help you evaluate the newest data on national tests; assess how your district will catch-up with their supports for disabled students; it’ll help you discover which subject the pandemic helped to highlight as an importance; you’ll be able to review federal rules on COVID-19 relief, testing, and student privacy; see how standardized testing may be in jeopardy; and you’ll gain key insights on assessments and English language learners so you can begin looking forward.

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Is the Bottom Falling Out for Readers Who Struggle the Most?

By Sarah D. Sparks

More and more American students are falling significantly behind in reading, and the widespread academic disruptions during the pandemic are likely to create a critical mass of struggling readers in the nation’s schools, analyses of federal data show.

There’s been no improvement in overall reading performance at any grade level in the national tests called the Nation’s Report Card for the past decade or more, with declines for lower grades happening since 2017 and for 12th graders since 2015.

That stagnation has been driven largely by a growing share of students failing to meet even the most basic level of reading proficiency, and by steadily falling scores in the National Assessment of Educational Progress for the 10 percent to 25 percent of students who struggle the most with reading.

The NAEP measures three levels of reading achievement—basic, proficient, and advanced—based on students’ understanding of literature and their ability to gain information from texts. However, since 2017, the number of students who cannot meet even the basic literacy benchmark has grown in 30 states among 8th graders and 17 states for 4th graders. Nearly half of 4th graders in New Mexico, for example, cannot meet the lowest reading benchmark, according to analysis by Ebony Walton, a statistician for NAEP.

The decline in performance for the bottom 10 percent of readers has spanned nearly all racial and socioeconomic groups, NCES reported in a symposium on reading research. And the drops have been significant enough to prompt the Council of Chief State School Officers and the Institute of Education Sciences to launch initiatives focused on studying and supporting the most-struggling readers.

“This is not a Black and brown problem. It’s not a problem just for poor students or students with special needs,” said Peggy Carr, the associate commissioner for the National Center for Education Statistics, which administers the NAEP. “We all are represented in the bottom—perhaps disproportionally for some relative to their representation in the population, but nonetheless we’re all there.”

What skills trip up struggling readers?

While the group of students who fall below basic reading performance has been growing, their educational status is largely a black hole. We still know relatively little about what these students can understand and what skills they most need, according to Lynn Woodworth, NCES commissioner.

In an attempt to get a clearer picture, one analysis by the IES looked at NAEP oral reading data from a nationally representative group of 1,800 4th graders from 180 public schools. While the study could not determine which skills caused students’ overall low reading performance, “a large body of research has established that foundational skills are the main drivers of oral reading fluency, which in turn is necessary for reading comprehension,” said Sheida White, an NCES researcher and the author of the study.

White found, for example, that, among below-basic-level readers, the difference in accuracy was greater between students in higher and lower groups than it was between readers in the proficient category and and those who barely missed making it into the basic reading performance category.

The lowest-performing 4th graders misread about 1 in 6 words, on average, and often didn’t recognize words in print that they knew from spoken language.

Low below-basic readers had significant trouble decoding key words, and focused on reading individual words rather than phrases, sentences, or passages. “In one example, demonstrated in the first audio clip found here, the 4th grade student only finished about a third of the text within the allotted time and read in a stilted monotone, which has been associated with poor comprehension. (The photo associated with these audio clips from IES does not depict either of the actual students speaking.)

By contrast, proficient readers like the one in this second audio excerpt, completed the passage and read with expression, pausing in the correct places and emphasizing particular parts of the text for listeners, showing understanding rather than just decoding the material.

P. David Pearson, a reading researcher and emeritus faculty member in the University of California, Berkeley, Graduate School of Education, argued educators need to avoid siloing different areas of reading instruction for different students and grades. Teaching reading comprehension should begin in the earliest grades, and teachers should continue to look for and remediate problems in decoding and other early-literacy skills among older struggling readers.

“We can fall into an either-or track, so comprehension and word recognition become a kind of a zero-sum game. And we want to discourage that,” Pearson said. “Just because we’re teaching them word recognition doesn’t mean that we can’t teach comprehension. And just because we’re focusing on building knowledge, doesn’t mean that we have to de-emphasize strategy instruction. ... We want to think of the various instructional components and
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3 Ways Assessment Can Help You Address Literacy Learning Loss

This school year, it will be even more critical to act on student data to improve reading outcomes. Universal screening can be a powerful component of a schoolwide assessment system for evaluating and eliminating learning loss. Here are three ways it can help.

1. Identify students at risk

Universal screening can help identify students whose scores indicate they are unlikely to be skilled readers in the future without instructional support. With the help of American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds, instructional support can be offered to many more students this year, including intervention that focuses on missing skills. For example, second-grade students who can’t yet read CVC words could receive extra phonics and decoding skill support.

2. Plan instruction and intervention to align to student needs

Knowing the percent of at-risk students will inform plans for classroom reading instruction and evidence-based interventions aimed at remediating learning loss. Grade-level teams can then place students appropriately in either regular instruction only or add more targeted intervention to address their specific learning needs and then use assessment data to monitor the progress of those students. For instance, if most third-grade students can’t read grade-level text accurately, explicit decoding of multisyllabic words may be the focus of classroom reading instruction as they begin fourth grade.

3. Evaluate the effectiveness of core instruction

End-of-year screening data can help administrators evaluate overall health and effectiveness of the instructional system. Classroom reading instruction is considered “generally effective” when 80% of students meet grade-level expectations and regarded as “well-matched” to student needs when the percentage of students at risk decreases across screenings. Grade-level teams can use the percentage change to determine whether they should maintain or adjust classroom reading instruction. In particular, if the percentage of at-risk kindergarten students increased, the first-grade team may plan for additional differentiation of core reading instruction.

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5 Characteristics of Effective Universal Literacy Screening Assessments

As another school year begins amid pandemic-related uncertainty, universal screening data can provide teachers and administrators with much needed insight—helping to identify and address student needs. Universal screening assessments that can be effectively used to plan for the school year and evaluate ongoing progress should have these five characteristics:

1. Brief
Universal screening assessments should be efficient and take as little time away from instruction as possible.

2. Predictive
Universal screening assessments should include benchmark goals that articulate the level of skill today that predicts reading health in the future.

3. Serve as indicators
Universal screening assessments should function as indicators of the essential early literacy and reading skills research has concluded are necessary for reading.

4. Linked to instruction
Universal screening assessments should measure skills that link directly to classroom reading instruction.

5. Standardized, reliable, and valid
Universal screening assessments should be reliable and valid measures given in standardized conditions to allow comparison of each student to other students, as well as to a research-based benchmark.

Implement effective universal screening assessments

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What Should Educators Look for in End-of-Year Reading Results

As we begin a new school year, spring literacy assessment scores can be especially useful for educators planning reading intervention and instruction. In the podcast Look Ahead to Summer and Fall Success Using Spring Assessment Data, assessment expert Dr. Kelly Powell-Smith shares the key indicators educators should look for at the student and systems levels when reviewing spring literacy assessment scores.

1. Student level
At the student level, warning signs might include a student ending the year either below or well below benchmark on critical reading skills or a student’s motivation level waning. It’s also important to identify those students who have not made much progress during the course of the year. Of particular concern are students who were part of an intervention group who have not made progress relative to other students in the intervention group.

2. Systems level
At the systems level, you should examine data that helps you make decisions about instructional effectiveness. Look at each tier of instruction and ask some questions. For example, is your core instruction helping students who began at benchmark stay at benchmark? In other words, are 95%–100% of students who started at benchmark still at benchmark? Are your interventions supporting most students—80% or more—who started below benchmark reduce their risk and reach benchmark? If, at any level of intervention, your students are not meeting target benchmarks, you may want to consider what resource allocation decisions can help you be more effective.

Examining end-of-year data and identifying strategies that can help you better plan for intervention and instruction is always a worthwhile investment.

Listen to the Podcast

go.voyagersopris.com/Look-Ahead
activities as complementary and integrated rather than completely separated and independent of one another.”

Reading skills and deficits compound over time. While the oral fluency study did not look at 12th graders, a proficient 4th grader reads aloud more accurately than an adult with only basic literacy—159 words correct per minute versus 123 words correct per minute, based on data from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

And poor reading skills significantly narrow students’ choices after high school. In a separate study based on the Program for International Student Assessment, IES researchers found U.S. students’ focus of study at age 19 was strongly linked to their reading proficiency at 15. For example, while 9 percent of all 19-year-olds were still working to earn a high school diploma and 26 percent were not studying for any higher degree, among students who had performed in the lowest two reading levels on PISA at age 15, 23 percent were still working to graduate high school at 19, and another 49 percent were not in school at all. By contrast, only about 4 percent of the best readers at age 15 were not studying for a postsecondary degree by 19.

In January 2020, just before the pandemic, the Council of Chief State School Officers released a report calling for states to pass new laws and launch initiatives aimed to improve reading performance gaps, according to Carr and Scott Norton, deputy executive director of programs for CCSSO.

Low-income students and students of color, who were already disproportionately more likely to read at a below-basic literacy level, have also been significantly more likely than white and wealthier students to learn only through remote and virtual instruction during the pandemic, Carr noted.

The percentage of 4th graders performing proficiently in science in 2019, according to national test results out in May 2021. The results are the latest from the National Assessment of Educational Progress in science. Since the assessment, known as “the nation’s report card,” was last given in science in 2019, 4th graders’ performance has declined overall, while average scores have been flat for students in grades 8 and 12.

The 4th grade scores were concerning,” said Peggy Carr, the associate commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, which administers NAEP. “Whether we’re looking at the average scores or the performance by percentiles, it is clear that many students were struggling with science.”

The percentage of 4th graders performing below the basic achievement level in science rose significantly in the last decade, to 27 percent, while the percentage at or above the “proficient” level fell in the same time, to 26 percent. (The proportions for grades 8 and 12 remained flat; a third of 8th graders were “below basic,” and slightly more were at or above proficient, while nearly twice as many 12th graders fell below basic as met the proficient benchmark, 41 percent to 22 percent, respectively.)

To put that in context, only a little more than a third of 4th graders could consistently explain concepts such as how forces change motion, how environmental changes can affect the growth and survival of animals or plants, and how temperature affects the state of matter.

And more than 40 percent of high school seniors could not consistently describe and explain things like the structure of atoms and molecules or design and critique scientific experiments and observational studies.

Nearly 90,000 students in grades 4, 8, and 12 from more than 3,900 schools participated in the 2019 assessment, the first digitally based administration of the science test. It included both interactive simulations and molecules or design and critique scientific experiments and observational studies.
Assessment

The problems were individual, though an international assessment in 2017 suggested that U.S. teenagers outperformed their global counterparts in math and science problems that require collaborative problem-solving.

Carr said the test generally aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards, on which 40 states and the District of Columbia have based their own science teaching standards. Georgia, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire are developing new science assessments under a federal pilot program.

Yet in grades 4 and 8, scores declined from 2015 for lower-performing students in all three science content areas: physical, life, and earth and space science. In grade 12, physical and life science scores fell while earth and space scores were flat since 2015.—

An analysis of NAEP’s background data finds only about 40 percent of 12th graders had even taken all the core science subjects of biology, chemistry, and physics during high school. However, there were large differences in course-taking by racial groups, with Asian-American students more than 20 percentage points more likely to take all three core science classes by 12th grade than students of any other racial group.

Trends mirror those in reading, math

Across grades 4 and 8, the scores of the lowest-performing 10 percent of students fell since 2015, while the top performers held steady. In 12th grade, low- and high-performers alike were flat from 2015.

These widening gaps between the highest- and lowest-performing students, particularly in grade 4, mirror similar trends seen in national and global reading, math, and social studies assessments.

Lynn Woodworth, the commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, which administers NAEP, said the center is studying ways that poor reading skills among the lowest-performing 10 percent of students might account for some of the gaps across multiple subjects.

There were no differences in performance between boys and girls in grades 4 and 8, though boys outperformed girls at grade 12. Compared with 2015, the scores of Black and white 4th graders declined while those of other racial backgrounds stayed flat. There were no changes by racial group from 2015 at higher grades.

“Particularly the 4th grade results, seeing the decline over the decade from 2009 is just very disappointing,” said Erika Shugart, the executive director of the National Science Teaching Association.

**Science Course-Taking Varies**
A larger percentage of Asian and male 12th grade students have taken courses in biology, chemistry, and physics since 8th grade compared to their racial/ethnic or gender peers.

**Struggling Students Continue Decline**
Results from the 2019 Science Assessment at grades 4, 8, and 12.

**Teacher collaboration can bolster science instructional time**
From surveys with teachers that accompanied the assessment, NCES researchers found students have less time to learn science than they have had in the past. Fifty-five percent of 4th graders got less than three hours of science instruction per week in 2019, an increase of 2 percentage points in the number of 4th graders getting less instructional time since 2015. By contrast, about 68 percent of 8th graders got at least four hours of science class per week, the same as in 2015.
Moreover, half of 12th graders, 42 percent of those in grade 8, and 30 percent of 4th graders only engage in “scientific inquiry-related classroom activities” once or twice a year—or never.

“The majority of 4th graders are spending under four hours a week in science, and NSTA strongly recommends that science be a minimum of an hour a day, five hours a week,” Shugart said. NAEP analysis found 4th graders who had less than three hours of science each week scored significantly lower than those who had the recommended five hours or more. “We understand the competition with math and English/language arts is fierce, and science right now is losing out. We think it’s really important that we help education stakeholders and parents understand how important science education is at all levels but especially at those elementary school levels. We’re not going to see a shift in scores until we’re spending more time in inquiry-based science.”

Some districts are trying to make room for science throughout the curriculum. In rural Palmyra, Pa., for example, Palmyra Middle School teachers across all subject areas collaborate for the school’s annual environmental education camp.

“We literally pack up all of 7th grade and live at the base of the Appalachian Trail for two weeks, doing full-on science with all hands on deck: The English teachers are teaching science, the math teachers are teaching science and environment,” said Jeff Remington, a science, technology, engineering, and math teacher at Palmyra Middle. After the pandemic closures prevented the camp from taking place, and budget cuts seemed likely to do the same, the community raised money to pay for teachers to send more than 600 students from both grades 7 and 8 this year. “We are doing a double dose of camp this year to make up for lost time from COVID. These kids have been, like, glued to devices just because of school and everything else, so this is the first time they’ve been kids since the pandemic started.”

Yet even before the pandemic, Remington said he had seen instructional time for science decrease, particularly in lower grades, in the years since the subject was dropped from requirements for federal accountability testing.

“Elementary science, I think, across the state and across the country, is what has really been hurting in science, because of the focus on high-stakes testing for math and language arts,” he said.

“I’d say we’re doing pretty well [in secondary science] because we chose to do hands-on inquiry for the lessons that we are doing, but at the elementary level, our district’s emphasis is still highly, highly on math and language arts,” he said. “When they get to middle school and we get to do these experiences, I think we can make up for some lost time from the elementary.”

Additional Resource
Remediation or Acceleration? What does the data say? Find out here.

Published on July 14, 2021

The Pandemic Made It Harder to Spot Students With Disabilities. Now Schools Must Catch Up

By Evia Blad

Kanisha Aikin had suspected her son, Carter, might have dyslexia, but it wasn’t until his Katy, Texas, school closed in March 2020 that she was certain.

Carter, then in 1st grade, quickly switched to remote learning alongside millions of students around the country as leaders struggled to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. That gave Aikin a rare chance to watch her son’s day-to-day learning experience up close.

As his virtual class did reading exercises, Carter struggled to blend sounds together. Even after seeming to master a word on one page of a book, he failed to recognize the same word a few pages later. Sometimes his frustration would lead to misbehavior or a lack of focus. And his reading skills were noticeably different from his classmates’ and even his younger sisters’.

“I was panicking,” Aikin said. “I thought, ‘If we don’t do something quick, he’s going to be in trouble.’ Regardless of the world shutting down, time was still passing, and he was still...
going to have to go to 2nd grade next year.”

Nationwide, 7.3 million students, around 14 percent of all public school students, receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the nation’s primary special education law. Policymakers have sounded alarms about meeting those students’ needs during the pandemic, and some fear there are children who need those services who haven’t been identified at all.

Parents and teachers are often the first to recognize the signs of disabilities in students. That’s especially true of students with learning disabilities, whose needs may not be as immediately obvious as those of other students who need special education services. And, during the pandemic, both parents and teachers have faced significant interruptions that have made recognizing those needs more difficult, educators told Education Week.

Like Aikin, some families flagged concerns as they supervised their children’s participation in online lessons. But many other parents—including those who couldn’t afford work interruptions—didn’t have the option of staying home to monitor their children’s remote learning or might not have recognized any subtle issues as they emerged.

For teachers, extended periods of remote learning or class time interrupted by frequent quarantines robbed them of the small ordinary encounters that can help them gauge students’ progress: how quickly children turn pages, how they engage with peers, how they respond to frustrations with reading and math exercises, even the appearance of their handwriting, which may have been replaced by typing into an online program.

Those dynamics combine with other challenges to form a perfect storm for schools as they seek to return to normal: They must work to separate which students need assessments for learning disabilities and which children’s academic struggles can be attributed to the ordinary fidgeting and grimacing that comes with learning in front of a computer.

Educators must work to recognize concerns that may have gone unidentified and to prioritize which newfound parental concerns are the most urgent. Many will do so with less data from classroom assessments and statewide exams than they would have in a typical year. And they will tackle those needs as they also strain to accommodate heightened social and emotional stress for all students after an unprecedented set of school years.

"It’s going to be really difficult to assess where students are and to determine whether what we are seeing is the result of a disability or a new baseline for everyone,” said Meghan Whitaker, the director of policy and advocacy for the National Center for Learning Disabilities.

Looking for warning signs of disabilities

With a family history of dyslexia, Aikin said her “radar was turned on very high” to warning signs for her children. As she studied up on the special education process, she enrolled Carter in a small private program focused on reading instruction. After getting a formal evaluation and diagnosis from her school district of dyslexia and dysgraphia, a disability related to handwriting, she’s weighing her options for the 2021-22 school year.

But there may be many children showing similar warning signs of disabilities that have gone undetected, said Winnie Williams-Hall, an 8th grade special education teacher in Chicago. The early signals of disabilities can be very difficult for parents, and even teachers, to recognize, she said. And remote learning made that even more difficult for educators.

“During in-person learning, you are face-to-face with a student, and you can gauge facial expressions, when you need to slow down,” Williams-Hall said. “But that’s difficult to do during virtual learning and the student doesn’t even have the camera on.”

Similarly, while a student with a behavioral disorder or emotional disturbance may physically disengage or seem defiant in an in-person classroom, that same student may mute their microphone and ignore their computer in

Regardless of the world shutting down, time was still passing and he was still going to have to go to 2nd grade next year.”

KANISHA AIKIN
PARENT OF A CHILD WITH DYSLEXIA
remote learning, and it can be difficult for educators to determine why they are absent from class discussions, Williams-Hall said.

Even for teachers familiar with learning disabilities, the sound quality and limitations of computer programs may have made it difficult to recognize them, said Teresa Ranieri, a teacher and literacy coach at a New York City elementary school.

During online reading exercises, it could be difficult to hear if a student was able to blend letter sounds together to form words, to deconstruct words into individual phonetic sounds, and to rhyme, she said.

“There’s a delay, there may be poor internet connection, and when all of the children say it at the same time, it’s very hard to hear them,” Ranieri said.

With a focus on science-based reading instruction, Ranieri’s school does universal assessments to gauge students’ reading skills and to determine who may need more-targeted evaluation. But those assessments were written to be administered in person, she said, and it’s difficult to measure how much online administration affected the reliability of their results.

With parents’ permission, Ranieri donned gloves and a mask and went to twin students’ home to evaluate them in person.

“I was able to identify strengths and needs so much more because I did it in person,” she said. “In my mind I’m thinking, ‘How can I go to everyone’s home to do this?’ ”

Online learning presents challenges

There’s no federal year-over-year data on special education evaluations, and states that tabulate such information do not yet have information on the 2020-21 school year. But signs point to a decline. In Indiana, for example, schools completed about 25,000 special education evaluations during the 2019-20 school year, which included the first few months of the pandemic. That was a 16 percent drop from the previous year, state officials told radio station WFYI. They cited school closures and drops in public school enrollment.

During the second half of the 2020-21 school year, more schools around the country that had operated remotely began to offer in-person or hybrid instruction. But even then, many families opted to keep their children at home.

For Williams-Hall, a return to the physical school building meant two students in the classroom and the rest of them on screens, an experience shared by many of her fellow teachers.

In a nationwide poll of parents conducted by NPR/Ipsos in March, 48 percent of respondents agreed with the statement “I am worried my child will be behind when the pandemic is over.”

School psychologists—who evaluate children for disabilities and help plan interventions and individualized education plans—anticipate an uptick in concern about issues like time management, student engagement, and social and emotional well-being.

Some parents and educators may also be unsure if students’ struggles can be traced back to a disability that requires targeted interventions, said Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach, the director of policy and advocacy for the National Association of School Psychologists. And, while schools want to identify the students in most urgent need of support, they will also want to avoid historical concerns about over- or under-identifying students—particularly students of color—for special education programs.

“We are worried about districts and schools using special education as a remedy for what happened in the past year,” Vaillancourt Strobach said. “You want to make sure you are accurately identifying students.”

Further complicating the process: Federal special education regulations call on schools to rule out a “lack of appropriate instruction” before diagnosing students with specific learning disabilities, which include processing issues that affect a student’s ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. Interruptions posed by the pandemic may make it difficult to rule that out.

The NASP and other organizations that advocate for students with disabilities have recommended that schools use federal COVID-19 relief aid provided through the American Rescue Plan to reengage all students through multitiered systems of support, through which educators use a leveled approach to provide increasingly intense help to students with academic or behavioral difficulties.

In such programs—like response to intervention and positive behavior interventions and support, or PBIS—Tier 1 includes all students. Tier 2 provides more moderate supports for students who need it, often through small group instruction, and Tier 3 provides more intense, one-on-one intervention for students with the highest degree of needs.

“In a typical year you will probably see 20 percent of your students need a little bit more” support Vaillancourt Strobach said. “What we are expecting this year is maybe 80 percent will need a little bit more.”

If students respond well to the lower level of support, that means they may have just needed some help reengaging after an atypical school year, psychologists said. But if they struggle even as they advance up the tiers, they may need to be evaluated for special education services.

“We really need to understand why they are so far behind,” said Whittaker, of the National Center for Learning Disabilities. “We have to just be careful and intentional in that process.”

But the multiple-tier approach has its critics, including advocates for students with disabilities who say schools don’t always have the resources to implement it well.

Whittaker said she hopes that schools will work quickly to invest in improving their systems.

“We have not implemented strong [multitiered systems of support] the way we need to,” she said. “Now we are putting such a magnifying glass on this issue. I’m really hoping that now is the time we really do something about this.”

But to anxious families who have seen signs of possible disabilities in their children, anything short of an immediate, individualized response could seem like stalling, some parents told Education Week.

That was the case for Lauren, a Massachusetts mother who did not wish to use her last name to protect her children’s privacy. During the pandemic, she noticed her twin sons, who just completed kindergarten, struggled with understanding phonics instruction.

“Everyone said, ‘Don’t worry about it. All kids are struggling. All kids are having problems,’” Lauren said.

But, after seeing one of her sons con-
fuse letter sounds and get frustrated with rhyming exercises, Lauren insisted on an in-person evaluation. Her school district complied, and a psychologist sat with her son outside the administration building to assess him, using the outdoor air as a virus precaution.

After seeing him in person, the evaluator quickly agreed Lauren’s son needed target-ed supports, and said his descriptions of his own experiences with reading sounded like textbook dyslexia, Lauren said.

After some discussion with the school, Lauren opted not to evaluate her other son right away. Instead, she will watch his progress as he participates in the same small groups and academic enrichment programs his school plans to offer all of its students as it focuses on pandemic recovery.

“I’m still a little wary that another issue might pop up,” she said.

A confusing process for parents

Parents who had concerns about their children’s learning told Education Week that the process of pursuing evaluations for special education, supporting their children’s academic work, and working with schools to create individualized education plans was overwhelming and confusing, even with supportive school leaders on their side.

Liana Durkin, an Alpharetta, Ga., single mother with a demanding work-from-home job, said it began to feel like “a full-time job” to help her 6th-grade daughter, Rylee, keep up with assignments, pay attention during six-hour days of online classes, and process concepts she clearly struggled to grasp.

After seeking her own diagnosis by an outside psychologist, Durkin requested a formal evaluation from Rylee’s school that later confirmed she needed support for ADHD. The process was confusing, and Durkin relied on advice from other parents and Facebook groups, where she heard stories about issues like delayed evaluations, confusing meetings with administrators, and a lack of support.

“I kept thinking about, yeah, I can’t even imagine the parents who have to go into work every day,” Durkin said.

In many cities, concerns about a backlog of special education evaluations predate COVID-19. But, even in the earliest days of school closures, there were signs the pandemic had exacerbated the problem.

As Congress deliberated its first relief bill, the CARES Act, school district admin-

ministrators pushed for waivers from some parts of IDEA, including timelines in the federal special education law that require evaluations to be completed within 60 days of a formal request. They cited an inability to do things like conduct assessments or provide supportive therapies for students learning in remote environments.

Asked by Congress to evaluate the need for IDEA waivers, then-U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos said the law’s requirements should largely remain in place, even during the national emergency.

“With ingenuity, innovation, and grit, I know this nation’s educators and schools can continue to faithfully educate every one of its students,” she wrote in April 2020.

Concerns about evaluation backlogs

But there are some signs schools failed to fulfill those mandates.

In March, for example, five Texas families sued the Austin Independent School District, claiming the school system had failed to respond to stalled requests for student evaluations and reevaluations. The district has since worked to address the backlog.

In August 2020, the state of Massachusetts intervened after a disability rights organization complained that the Nashoba Valley Regional School District had sus-pended all in-person evaluations, leaving some children in limbo.

Beyond those unmet requests, advocates are concerned about children who have fallen through the cracks because the educators who might normally notice their struggles failed to see them.

Aikin, the Texas mom, sees the progress her son has made after she identified his dyslexia, but she’s mindful that many other children’s needs may have gone unnoticed.

“So many children are missed and overlooked,” she said.

As she weighs whether to send Carter back to public school in the coming school year, Aikin has seen signs of progress.

Her son who once ran away from reading assignments now asks to go to the library and bring books with him in the car. Recently, the family was passing through a restaurant drive-thru when Aikin heard Carter pipe up from the back seat. He was trying to read a sign out loud without any prompting.

“I almost hit the car in front of me,” she said. “The fact that he was initiating, trying to read, was step one.”

Published on June 22, 2021

Federal Rules in the Pipeline on COVID-19 Relief, Testing, Student Privacy

By Andrew Ujifusa

The Biden administration plans to issue regulations governing two programs in the American Rescue Plan, as well as the federal law governing the privacy of student records and a pilot for new student assessments, among other priorities.

The list of upcoming rules from the U.S. Department of Education also includes those that would affect magnet schools, charter school fa-cilities, and preschool special education grants.

Two notable sets of regulations that are relatively advanced in the bureaucratic process concern the American Rescue Plan, the coronavirus relief package signed into law by President Joe Biden in March that includes nearly $130 billion for K-12 education.

One involves the American Rescue Plan’s $800 million earmarked to support homeless students, a group that’s been hit particularly hard by the pandemic. The Education Depart-ment says its rules for the program will apply to three-quarters of the funding and will focus on the formula that state education agencies use to provide subgrants to local school districts.

“Rulemaking is needed to establish the authority for State educational agencies ... to provide subgrants under this program,” the depart-ment said in a description of the upcoming rule.

The department released $200 million of
that aid for homeless students in late April.

The other concerns the relief package’s $2.75 billion in relief for private schools. In describing its proposal, the Education Department notes that the package says this funding must go to private schools enrolling “a significant percentage of low-income students” and to “schools most impacted by COVID-19.” The agency notes that the American Rescue Plan does not define these terms, and that rules are necessary to do so.

Last year, then-U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos caused an uproar by pushing for virtually all private school students to benefit from coronavirus relief in the CARES Act, on the grounds that they were affected by COVID-19 just like their school counterparts. But her critics alleged that she was trying to twist federal rules in order to help out private schools, even if they were wealthy and relatively unaffected by the virus, at the expense of public schools and many disadvantaged students. DeVos ultimately lost that battle.

The upcoming rule from Biden’s Education Department, by contrast, could put relatively restrictive terms on which private schools benefit, or benefit the most, from the American Rescue Plan, depending on their status and demographics. Any rule would not apply to the separate, $2.75 billion pot of funding for private schools that Congress enacted in the second big COVID-19 relief package from December 2020.

The upcoming rules for homeless students and private schools under the American Rescue Plan both are pending at the administration’s Office of Management and Budget. It’s not certain when they’ll be cleared and released to the public, although the office does not show any upcoming OMB meetings about the rules for either the homeless funding or the private school funding.

Some of the items have appeared on the “unified agenda” for upcoming regulations previously.

For example: Many in the education field have been hoping for years that lawmakers will revamp the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act to account for changes in education technology and other shifts in how schools operate. An upcoming rule from the department would fall well short of that reauthorization, but would aim to clarify the definition of “education records.” The rule would also attempt to clarify “provisions regarding disclosures to comply with a judicial order or subpoena.”

It’s not exactly clear what’s prompted this language. But tension between protecting student information and school safety was thrust onto the public stage after the 2018 shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla. Some in Florida pushed for schools to share student information, such as medical records, with law enforcement on the grounds that such action could save lives, but civil liberties advocates were wary of such proposals. The Trump administration also weighed in on the issue after the Parkland shootings.

“It’s evident that FERPA permeated the Broward school district’s pervasive and continuing cover-up of what its personnel knew about [the alleged shooter], and what they did or didn’t do to prevent a deeply troubled student from becoming a mass murderer,” the Sun Sentinel newspaper, which covers the Broward County school district, declared in a 2018 editorial.

Here are a few other notes from the regulatory agenda put out by the Biden administration:

- The Education Department plans to issue a rule for the testing pilot authorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act. The pilot was intended to push states and schools to explore new ways to assess students in order to improve instruction and learning, although it hasn’t exactly attracted a swarm of interest so far.

- The administration also plans to issue rules for a part of the federal Charter Schools Program that’s designed to help states establish or enhance per-pupil funding for charter school facilities, and to support annual financing for those facilities.

- Upcoming rules for the federal Magnet Schools Program will help “magnet schools that incorporate evidence-based designs and strategies that have been shown to both increase diversity and improve outcomes for students.” The department says this will further Biden’s executive order on “advancing racial equity” across the federal government. The Biden administration wants $1.49 million in assistance for magnet schools in its proposed budget, a $40 million increase from current funding.

Published on July 21, 2021

Standardized Tests Could Be in Jeopardy in Wake of Biden Decisions, Experts Say

By Andrew Ujifusa

A brief from two researchers explores a question that could grow in importance as the pandemic persists: To what extent could the coronavirus intensify the pressure on—and increase public skepticism about—standardized tests in general?

To find answers or at least clues, Paul Bruno and Dan Goldhaber looked at states’ requests for waivers from annual standardized testing requirements this past spring; how the U.S. Department responded; and what trends emerged from what states sought and what the feds granted.

Their analysis involved looking at waiver requests this past spring from 11 states and the District of Columbia in which they sought to get permission to cancel statewide exams, administer tests only in certain grades, and limit which grades took certain subject tests.

In general, they found a certain disconnect between policymakers’ expressed aims and the likely impact of some of their decisions. They also said some constituencies might find notably less value in the scores than others, even amid significant concerns about the pandemic’s impact on student learning.

Ultimately, COVID-19 could intensify pre-existing concerns about the value of
standardized tests and undermine political support for them, unless education leaders respond to them with the current environment in mind, Bruno and Goldhaber argue.

Bruno is an assistant professor of education policy at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Goldhaber is the director of the Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research, which is a joint project of the American Institutes for Research and scholars at several universities.

“Policymakers are not articulating a very clear story about how test results could be translated into useful, diagnostic information” for parents, educators, and the public at large, Bruno said in an interview. “If you support annual standardized testing, there are reasons to be worried that the support for standardized testing is quite soft.”

Yet there’s a contending view that the pandemic hasn’t dramatically altered basic facts about the different value of different tests, or fundamental disagreements about the statewide exams that have persisted for two decades or more.

For all the issues with state testing this year, there is “no state that comes close to saying: We’re going to take the non-statewide data and make it actionable in some way,” said Charles Barone, the vice president of K-12 policy at Democrats for Education Reform and a former congressional staffer.

The impact of the delta variant of the coronavirus on schools as they start the 2021-22 school year remains uncertain. Yet if in-person classes are disrupted significantly, that could fuel resistance to statewide standardized exams.

Relying on clear action plans for test scores the public understands could be key

Debate about the long-term fate of the tests intensified Spring of 2021, after the U.S. Department of Education said it would not grant states “blanket” waivers from the exams like they received in 2020 when the pandemic first took hold. Top congressional Democrats for education policy alongside some advocacy groups pushed to maintain the testing requirement, although President Joe Biden indicated that he opposed mandated standardized testing during his 2020 presidential campaign.

Ultimately, the District of Columbia got approval to cancel the English/language arts and math exams required by federal law. All other states who sought to cancel those exams were unsuccessful, although a few did receive permission to ease their testing requirements in other ways.

The education department refused to let school districts substitute locally chosen exams for statewide ones, on the grounds that the ability to use statewide tests to compare results between schools and districts is crucial.

Yet other decisions by the department undermined the ability for education leaders to do that very thing, according to Bruno and Goldhaber. As an example, they highlighted the department’s decision to waive the federal requirement that at least 95 percent of eligible students take the annual exams. Any major variations in the share of students taking the tests between schools and districts will make comparisons challenging.

The decision by states with the department’s approval to shorten tests or to delay administering them until summer or the fall (as New Jersey has done) further weakens the ability of schools to provide information that is important for parents to know and for teachers to act on in a timely fashion, the analysis says. And California effectively empowered districts to decide whether to give the annual state exams, based on local conditions, without actually receiving a federal waiver, a development Barone called “very dangerous.”

The lack of state test results from 2020 also makes measuring student growth in typical ways impossible, Bruno and Goldhaber note.

Ultimately, the department’s actions seem to have been driven in large part by a “concern that even temporarily waiving statewide tests would give momentum to those advocating for the elimination of testing altogether.”

In the February letter to states outlining the department’s position on tests, acting Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education Ian Rosenblum stated directly that aside from reasons to maintain testing related to schools’ decisions about responding to the pandemic, “Parents need information on how their children are doing.”

Bruno stressed in the interview that slogans like “we cannot fix what we do not measure” might sound nice, but they don’t really help teachers and education officials make decisions about how to use test results in a way that feels clear and important to the public at large.

In such cases, “we’re not actually thinking about how we want to design testing policies to achieve specific objectives,” Bruno said, making it less likely “that we will achieve any objectives.”

He expects to see resistance to statewide exams for the 2021-22 school year to emerge in the summer and fall.

Barone acknowledged that it will be a problem if schools can’t turn around test-score data from the 2020-21 school year in a timely way to make it useful for the upcoming year. However, he said the analysis from Bruno and Goldhaber doesn’t grapple with the limits of diagnostic tests that might provide information on a small scale but aren’t administered on a statewide basis.

Civil rights groups remain supportive of the statewide exams where data is comparable across official boundaries, he said, while political forces that are opposed to standardized testing will remain so.

And most states haven’t committed to using systems that rely on achievement data to inform their COVID-19 interventions to help students during the pandemic, although he noted many states are relying on chronic absenteeism.

Although Bruno and Goldhaber cite rising opposition to standardized tests in public opinion polling from PDK International, Barone said other polling shows something different.

“Parents and taxpayers are ambivalent and nuanced about testing. They also know that they want that data,” Barone said.

Those involved in conversations about state testing should be paying more attention to what states are doing under an innovative testing pilot authorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act, he added. The lessons states learn from those efforts could bolster the value of standardized tests without exacerbating political tensions about them, Barone said.

State tests provide alignment with state standards and the authority of state government, as well as the power to compare results across jurisdictions the state cares about, said Andrew Ho, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education who’s proposed a way for states to report 2020-21 test scores clearly and responsibly.

But he said it would be better for officials and others to undersell what different tests can do and then overdeliver on results, rather than making grandiose claims. State test scores are “supremely useful” but can’t serve all purposes for all people, he said.

“What we really need to do is explain how we used test scores to allocate support,” Ho said. “If a district said, these test scores changed our minds and informed our decisions, then ‘the stated theory of action becomes the enacted theory of action.’”

Leader To Learn From
Taking an Unapologetic Approach to Curriculum Overhaul

Click Here to Read
‘Nation’s Report Card’ Has a New Reading Framework, After a Drawn-Out Battle Over Equity

By Sarah Schwartz

The governing board that oversees the test known as the “nation’s report card” has adopted a new framework for designing the reading assessment, one that will provide more granular information about student performance by socioeconomic status and race and test students’ ability to read across disciplinary contexts.

But even after a unanimous vote to approve the new framework last week, some members of the panel tapped to develop the document have lamented what they see as missed opportunities for a fairer test—the after-effect of a heated back-and-forth over equity in assessment during the development process over the past several years.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress, the NAEP, is given to a nationally representative sample of U.S. students to measure what they know and can do across subjects. The National Assessment Governing Board supervises the NAEP, and leads the process for updating the frameworks that guide how the test is constructed. The reading framework was last revised in 2009. The new changes will go into effect for the 2026 test administration.

A key consideration in updating the framework is maintaining NAEP’s long-term trend line, the ability to compare results from upcoming years to past scores, so as to draw conclusions about whether students are improving or not. (The National Center for Education Statistics, which conducts and analyzes NAEP tests, has said that the new adopted framework is likely to maintain trend.)

Understanding what the trends are is especially important now, said Lesley Muldoon, the NAGB’s executive director, to evaluate the effect that COVID-19 has had on student achievement “so that people can have a trusted baseline that they can use going forward.”

The framework development process has always included a diversity of perspectives, with varying factions working to hammer out their differences to develop a consensus document. But tensions ran especially high this time.

The debate raised questions central to the construct of reading itself: What does “real-world reading” actually look like? And how much of it is influenced by readers’ cultural backgrounds and the social contexts in which they learn?

At the same time, these conversations were taking place in the middle of a national conversation on race that has pushed educational organizations to consider how teaching, learning, and assessment can better support students of color.

Framework offers more data on students’ reading across disciplines

There are significant changes in the consensus document—changes that advocates on both sides of the framework debate said, in interviews with Education Week, would make NAEP a richer source of data on students’ reading ability.

The new framework calls for more detailed reporting on NAEP subgroups. Scores won’t just be disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and English-language learner status, but also differentiated by socioeconomic status within race and ethnicity. So, going forward, it would be possible to see the differences in scores between Black students from high-income families and Black students from low-income families, for example.

Students will also be tested on their ability to read informational text in social studies and science. This isn’t meant to evaluate students’ content knowledge—“this is not a test about whether they know the causes of the American Revolution,” Muldoon said—but rather that students can use discipline-specific reading skills in genres they’ll encounter in the classroom and real world.

And the framework adds a new “comprehension target,” or tested component of reading comprehension ability. Previously, the framework included three: 1) locate and recall information, 2) integrate and interpret information, and 3) analyze and evaluate information.

Now, students will also be expected to “use and apply” what they read, to solve problems or create something new. For example, after reading a series of opinion pieces on a subject, a student might be asked to write a blog that synthesizes the different positions or offers their own argument.

“This is not just your mother’s and father’s ‘find the main idea,’” said David Steiner, a professor of education at Johns Hopkins University and the executive director of its Institute for Education Policy. (Steiner was not involved in the drafting of the framework, but has commented publicly on the process.)

Other updates to the framework formalize changes that have already been made to the
NAEP, following its shift to digital, rather than paper, administration. These include updates such as incorporating more digitally native text—such as what might be read on websites—and virtual “characters” that simulate a classroom environment or group work.

One new feature added to this list: Test-takers will also have examples of student responses to questions, to better illustrate what a strong response looks like.

‘What kind of reading do we want to draw inferences about?’

In an early August board meeting, held both in person in McLean, Va., and streamed online, members praised the consensus process that resulted in the framework adoption.

Still, some members of the development panel felt that the final version diverged too far from the initial drafts—and that commitments made to equity were stripped at the 11th hour by a vocal minority of NAGB’s main board.

At the heart of this disagreement were two interconnected questions: How to define reading comprehension and what constitutes “real-world” reading.

Early versions of the framework, written by the NAGB-appointed development board, put forth a sociocultural model of reading comprehension. The model argues that reading is in part about what’s going on inside a student’s head—the cognitive processes—but that comprehension is greatly influenced by social and cultural contexts like home, school, and community.

These early drafts also broadened the use of “informational universal design elements,” text introductions, pop-ups, and videos that give students some background knowledge about the passages that they are about to read. This change was suggested because research has shown that reading comprehension ability is greatly influenced by readers’ background knowledge on the topic. (Students will probably have an easier time reading Animal Farm, for example, if they have some understanding of the Russian Revolution.)

Gina Cervetti, an associate professor of literacy at the University of Michigan School of Education, and a member of the framework development panel, said that beefing up these knowledge scaffolds would have made NAEP a truer test of students’ reading comprehension ability. It would test their knowledge of text structures, or their skills in analyzing information, rather than their content knowledge, she said. It would level the playing field for students who come to the test with different stores of knowledge.

When this version of the framework was put out for public comment, though, it brought forth harsh criticism from some corners of the education world. “This came to be seen as an attempt to inflate the scores of traditionally underperforming students,” Cervetti said. “And nothing could be further from the truth.”

But Steiner, who criticized the draft framework when it was released for comment, said that providing all that supporting information would have created conditions on the NAEP that don’t exist in real-world reading. Take a word like yacht, he said. “You could argue, and this is argued in many state assessments, you can’t use a word like yacht, because less-affluent students have not grown up in a world of yachts.”

But “yacht,” Steiner said, is a word that regularly shows up in works that students might be expected to read as adults: news, magazines, novels. It’s part of a broad public vocabulary that students would be expected to know, and that teachers could reasonably be expected to make sure students know, he said.

Testing whether students are prepared for reading in college and career should include testing whether they can read and make sense of texts that include that word, he argued—and not testing this could mask indicators that students might have trouble with reading later on.

The draft framework was released for public comment summer of 2020, and the development panel incorporated changes resulting from that feedback. But in May 2021, when the revised framework was presented to the full board, some members thought the changes didn’t go far enough.

Grover (Russ) Whitehurst, a NAGB board member and former director of the Institute of Education Sciences, conducted his own, further revision of the document, striking most of the references to sociocultural frameworks and toning down the use of informational UDEs, to the alarm of many members of the original development panel.

“The goal ... is to handle background knowledge in ways that strengthen the validity of the assessment, rather than trying to define it out of existence as a factor in reading comprehension,” Whitehurst wrote at the time.

To hammer out these differences and create a consensus document, NAGB’s chair, Haley Barbour, assembled a smaller, cross-committee working group which put forth the final framework as adopted.

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In the real world, outside of a standardized assessment, we rarely read completely unfamiliar texts in isolation.”

GINA CERVETTI
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LITERACY
THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Possible changes to framework development process on the horizon

Pearson said the final framework is “something to be celebrated,” but also that he would want to see more work done—in defining reading in more of a sociocultural context, which he said would bring NAEP in line with other national and international assessments, and in gathering more data about students’ school and community environments. And he questioned the framework development process, which requires that NAGB approve new developments through consensus.

“I think that’s a great tradition, but if things get controversial, and if there are ideological...
Assessment Strategies for English-Language Learners

By Larry Ferlazzo

This week’s question-of-the-week is:

What are effective assessment strategies for multilingual learners?

Assessment is a key element of teaching—we need to know where our students are in the learning process, how effective our instructional strategies have been, and if there are additional challenges we need to be aware of as we plan future lessons and student support.

Assessments, however, cannot be used in a one-size-fits-all strategy.


Maximizing ‘Linguistic and Cultural Equity’

Margo Gottlieb, WIDA co-founder and lead developer, introduces assessment as, for, and of learning in her 2016 book, Assessing English Language Learners: Bridges to Equity, and expands on the approaches in subsequent books, chapters, and articles. Her most current publication is Classroom Assessment in Multiple Languages: A Handbook for Teachers (Corwin, 2021):

When thinking about effective assessment strategies for multilingual learners, what if we switched our attention away from school or district scores generated from testing that leave “gaps” in student performance and revisit data through the lens of stakeholders? Let’s start with a series of questions about multilingual learners, our most important stakeholders, to help position their centrality in the assessment process and provide a context for interpreting assessment data.

• What are the languages, cultures, and educational backgrounds of your multilingual learners?

• To what extent does your language program leverage your multilingual learners’ languages and cultures in curriculum and instruction?

• To what extent do your multilingual learners connect their personal interests and their home/community life to school?

The first step in planning classroom assessment is to determine its purpose. How might you prioritize the primary reasons for assessing multilingual learners in one or more languages?

• Do you want to get a pulse on multilingual learners’ thinking, how they are feeling, and their self-reflection on learning? Being more inclusive of students’ views and encouraging student agency are features of assessment as learning.

• Do you want to provide feedback to multilingual learners to move their learning forward? Acting on insight from the interaction between students and teachers during instruction reflects assessment for learning.

After a drawn-out public battle over the reading framework, the framework development process itself is up for review this September by the NAGB board—in part, so the team can “have an easier time with framework development in the future,” said Sharyn Rosenburg, NAGB’s assistant director for assessment development, in the board meeting last week.

Ideally, Whitehurst said, the framework development process going forward would produce documents in which “the tensions are already worked out.”
Assessment of learning at a classroom level is shaped by teachers, individually or as a department or grade-level team, with input from students. It represents what students have accomplished at the culmination of a period of instruction, such as a unit of learning. Assessment of learning is geared to determining student growth over time and centers on collaboration among teachers with support of school or district leaders to:

- match evidence for assessment with learning targets
- document extent of meeting standards for units of learning
- share of learning for products, performances, or projects
- guide student production of capstone projects or portfolios

Together, assessment as, for, and of learning offers a comprehensive system that optimizes opportunities for multilingual learners to participate as educators strive to maximize linguistic and cultural equity for their students.

**Rubrics, Portfolios, & Conferences**

Cindy Garcia has been a bilingual educator for 15 years and is currently a districtwide specialist for PK-6 bilingual/ESL mathematics. She is active on Twitter @CindyGarciaTX and on her blog: When assessing multilingual learners, teachers have to keep in mind both content and language. Teachers also have to be focused on what they assess and academic-language development might not always be something they need to assess.

Rubrics can be an effective way to assess student understanding because there are multiple indicators that students are trying to meet. Rubrics are also a good tool for assessing multilingual learners because they provide a consistent criterion for grading when tasks or projects might be subjective. This criterion helps teachers ignore other factors and use only the criteria in the rubric to assess student learning. Instead of multiple-choice type of assessment where there is only one correct response, a rubric allows the teacher to pinpoint what the student is understanding and what the student has yet to master. A rubric has a rating scale that provides the teacher with a way to provide feedback for students that will help them think about their work, ask questions, seek clarification, and improve their work. Rubrics also help students take ownership of their learning, because they are able to use the rubric to evaluate their work before they submit it for grading.

Portfolios are another great way to assess multilingual learners because the teacher is able to see evidence of student work and learning for a longer period of time than an end-of-unit assessment. This allows the teacher to see if the students “got it” right away and have they been able to “keep it” for longer than the length of the unit of instruction. When compiling a student portfolio, there are usually multiple pieces of evidence or student work for each concept, standard, or topic. Student-work samples could be writing prompts, a project, multiple-choice test, etc. This means that student portfolios also show a clearer picture of how a student learns.

Another effective strategy to assess multilingual learners is student-teacher conferences. Conferring with students provides students the opportunity to explain and share what they have learned without the usual stress of completing a formal test. Conferring also allows the teacher to provide more authentic feedback.

- Do you want to contribute to programmatic or schoolwide accountability? Using student projects, performances, and products, along with uniform criteria for success formulated by teachers with input from students, are representations of assessment of learning.

Now that you have a purpose and a corresponding approach to assessment in mind, let’s explore their associated effective strategies.

**Assessment as learning** as a classroom practice is a student-driven activity that broadens multilingual learners’ voice, empowerment, and identity. Assessment as learning can occur face-to-face or online when multilingual learners interact with their peers in the language(s) of their choice to:

- explore topics or issues of mutual interest
- contribute to crafting classroom activities or tasks
- engage in self- and peer assessment
- pursue learning from their own perspectives
- select preferred mode(s) of communication (e.g., oral, written, graphic, visual) for processing information and expressing learning.

**Assessment for learning** might begin with teacher and student conversations leading to collaboration in making mutually agreed upon learning goals. Both are keenly aware of where multilingual learners are in their learning that is anchored to grade-level academic content and language proficiency/development standards. In assessment for learning, multilingual learners interact with their teachers in English or their shared language(s) to:

- co-construct criteria for success and types of acceptable evidence for their work
- apply criteria for success to give criterion-referenced feedback
- plan differentiated instruction for content and language learning
- give feedback in real time to student performance or needs.

**Assessment of learning** at a classroom
because it’s real-time feedback that addresses student questions, wonderings, or misconceptions. Conferring makes it easier for the teacher to focus the conversation just on content, academic-language development, or another area. The goal of each conference can be focused on the precise needs of each student and provide the specific data that teachers need to plan for instruction.

‘Portfolio-Based Assessment’

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Developmentally appropriate assessment strategies for young English-/dual-language learners do not focus on one-shot test scores. The truth is, 4- and 5-year-old children are just not that interested in displaying their knowledge on demand. Terms like portfolio, sampling, and multiple measures guide best practices for the early years.

Children who are developing multiple languages have separate language systems for each of their languages. They learn some content in one language and some content in the other language. Even if they seem very strong in English, they may not have English words for all of the knowledge they’ve developed in their other language(s).

It is important to provide all screening and assessment in both of their languages. Further, the bilingual brain does not function the same way as two monolingual brains. According to research, the best screening and assessment tools would be designed specifically for bilingual thinkers and would capture what they know and can do in both of their languages. These kinds of tools are not available with sufficient quality and in the variety of languages needed. Kindergarten-entry assessments and other district-mandated monolingual assessments are not very accurate for young children who are multilingual learners. The best approach is to gather data about a child’s skills and knowledge through a variety of measures over time. I like to say that, in the early years, assessment is not a score, it’s a folder. Scores might be in the folder along with lots of other information that teachers can use to chart a child’s progress and determine their learning needs.

The solution recommended by most experts is to practice portfolio-based assessment. Instead of focusing on a snapshot or numeric score, portfolios allow teachers to gather authentic evidence about what each child understands and talks about. Portfolio-assessment software is available with some curriculum models or as independent products. They may include prompts, benchmarks, and a variety of ways to enter data on an ongoing basis.

It is very important that teachers should be allowed to use phones or tablets to record language and activity at any time during the day. This is critical for multilingual learners because it is the most accurate way to fully capture what the children actually say when they are talking in a language that is unfamiliar to the teacher. It is also critical that teacher assistants who are bilingual must be carefully prepared to participate in the assessment process as they may be the only adults who have home-language interactions with some of the bilingual children.

Information obtained from families can be another important component of the assessment process. A teacher might not ask the parents of a 7th grader about how they are doing with algebra at home, but many preschool and kindergarten children show advances in language and learning at home that may not be evident in the classroom. For example, a shy English-learner may not participate in singing activities at school but the family might send a video of the child singing happily with sophisticated lyrics at home. Young children may not always perform on demand or in expected ways at school. Families can also provide cultural context and information about the young child’s interests that help the teacher scaffold learning for each individual child. Multiple measures over an array of activities and times of day will make it possible for young children to show more accurately what they know and can do—and what they are ready to do next.

Thanks to Margo, Vivian, Cindy, and Karen for their contributions!

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