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# Improving Second Language Learning Through Performance-Based Assessment Practices

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ABSTRACT

From the time of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) to the present day, standardized testing has become the benchmark measure for student assessment and school accountability in the United States. Multilingual learners are a vulnerable population with more testing and accountability requirements than mainstream students. Not only are they required to learn a second language, but they are also assessed within the same standardized testing paradigms as their peers - native speakers of the English language. This study aimed to examine and evaluate the benefits of instructional practices and assessments that provide multilingual students and teachers prompt and meaningful feedback where the data inform further instruction. The context of the study assesses the multilingual student population in K-8 with the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS) test. For this study, the researcher used a mixed methodology research design. The researcher surveyed and interviewed teachers with experience working with the multilingual student population, and interviewed parents of children receiving bilingual services in combination with reflective memos. The research findings concluded that assessment data is essential for planning future instruction and providing measures to assist students. However, the ACCESS data is not immediate, lacks specificity, and yearly testing depletes the opportunities for interventions to assess multilingual learners' progress and language development adequately. Therefore, the researcher recommends using performance-based instructional practices and assessments that ignite student learning, curiosity, and relevancy.

Acknowledgments

First, I want to thank my parents, who inspired me to embark on this extensive journey - Alberto Granados and Aureliana DelCastillo. They both immigrated to the United States and selflessly sacrificed much to provide my siblings and me with a better life and education. Since I can remember, my parents always embedded the importance of education. I would also like to thank my biggest fans in this journey - my brother and sister-in-law- Alberto Jr. and Jen. Thank you for all the late nights spent listening to my read-aloud, reading my chapters, providing input, and being present when I wrote the last words of my dissertation. In addition, I want to give thanks to my high school teacher, who played an essential role in my academic career - Mr. Héctor Freytas. Thank you for believing in me and inspiring me to pursue my goals. Furthermore, I want to thank my colleagues and friends who supported me through the easy and challenging moments. Finally, I would like to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Jason Stegemoller, Dr. Stuart Carrier, and my chair Dr. Elizabeth Minor, for their extensive support and feedback throughout my dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."*

- Albert Einstein

**Introduction to Study**

The fall of 1997 marked the beginning of Lupita's educational journey. Filled with excitement to make new friends and meet her teachers, her academic journey began. Her parents had migrated to the United States from Mexico, making Spanish the only language spoken at home. Therefore, the elementary school placed Lupita in their bilingual program, where all instruction and learning took place in Spanish, with pull-out sessions dedicated to learning English. A journey that seemed to shed a pleasant learning experience by starting off in a bilingual program that recognized and acknowledged her native language in her first four years suddenly became a confined and solitary journey. The bilingual program at the school pushed students into full English immersion classrooms after 4th grade, regardless of their English proficiency. Lupita's transition was difficult, but she could still count on the relationships she had built with her English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors. Language, for the first time, became a barrier to engaging in class discussions and sharing with others, and of course, affected parent involvement.

Mrs. Hamilton, her 5th-grade teacher, would constantly ridicule her in front of the classroom for mispronunciation, and her delay in responding and speaking in Spanish. The ESL sessions became Lupita's safe haven, where she did not fear making mistakes. One day, her class was covering a chapter about Paul Revere when Mrs. Wilken, her ESL instructor, interrupted class to pull her out for the usual small group instruction. For the first time, Lupita was able to see that she understood the passage and was citing textual evidence to support her answers. That same day, Mrs. Wilken presented Lupita with a reward for her reading comprehension progress, which helped boost her confidence. For Lupita, the reward

represented a huge accomplishment. The long hours of studying at home were paying off. Happy and with her smile from ear to ear, she returned to her classroom. Upon her return, the class transitioned into a class discussion activity on the same passage. Feeling confident and optimistic, Lupita proudly raised her hand to answer the question being asked. *"Lupita, why are you raising your hand? You know you can't understand English,"* was her teacher's response that only embarrassed her, once again, in front of the entire classroom. Lupita's smile was short-lived, her happiness depleted, and her confidence shattered into pieces with these striking words.

Nineteen years later, these words have fueled me to become the teacher I am today. A teacher who understands that a delay in a response is not defiance. A teacher who understands that the English as a Second Language (ESL) and the English Language Learner (ELL) label does not imply a deficit. A teacher, who understands that a standardized test score does not define nor measure a student's academic and language potential. A teacher who understands that the lack of parental involvement is not due to their disregard for education or interest. Most importantly, a teacher who understands the importance of embracing students for their cultural and linguistic identity. My story is not a sad one. My story is not asking for sympathy. My story is simply one of many similar stories from first-generation students like myself who come from different linguistic backgrounds and cultures. Students whose English is not their first language. Students with parents who speak another language. Students with families who cannot actively participate within the school community as they would desire. My story mirrors the ugly aftermath of the Eurocentric and imperialist ideals, including language dominance rooted in pre-colonialism that has penetrated the inner core of bilingual education across the United States through educational policies. For all these educational policies, my story continues to be the same for many students nationwide today. My story and

research are dedicated to all those students and families who remain voiceless, embarrassed, ashamed, and marginalized for the simple fact of not knowing English.

As a foreign language instructor in urban public schools and college settings, I have worked in various grades, from the middle to secondary levels. I have used a variety of grading systems in those settings. In early 2017 while student-teaching 9th and 11th grade Spanish as a Foreign Language, I adhered to the high school's standards-based grading system used throughout the school. Here, students were assessed by their competencies in the language based on their performance level. As an instructor at the college level, I found that assessments, grades, and student scores originated in a significantly different system. Evaluation is mainly through a cumulative multiple-choice test that is highly specific and less applicable to real life. Regardless of the amount dedicated to reading during in-class activities, students are assessed on reading comprehension without the reading excerpt. This type of assessment does not focus on evaluating students' language skills but on their memorization capability. Ricardo-Osorio (2008) concluded that the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL) and the National Standards are more likely to develop performance-based assessments for speaking and writing at the college level but less so for assessing reading and listening. Reading and listening are two neglected domains and prone to be evaluated with discrete-point tests. At this level, performance becomes less reflective of the grade, yet earning a good one is paramount for college students who must maintain a certain grade point average for scholarships and financial aid.

The same grading culture that dominates the college level also dominates Kamino School District, where I have taught Spanish for five years. Located out of a suburb, it uses a letter-grading system that does not appear to assess student performance accurately. In addition, the school has a plus-or-minus (+/-) grading system in which an A- is not enough.

This grading system places additional pressure on students pursuing a higher placement level at the high school while negatively impacting students performing at or below average. Furthermore, the school district employs two classifications of Honor Roll status - Honor Roll and High Honor Roll implying an academic superiority for students who earned the High Honor Roll status. Feldman (2019) states, "Common grading practices make us active accomplices in perpetuating the achievement and opportunity gap that favors students with privilege and harms students with less privilege: students of color, from low-income families, who receive special education services, and English learners" (pp. xxii). Therefore, as an educator, improving the grading system is vital for adequately assessing all students, including the multilingual learner population.

     For this study, I will use the term multilingual learner (ML) to refer to students learning English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Language Learners (ELL).

**Problem Statement**

As a result of the 1983 report published by the Reagan administration, *A Nation at Risk,* the federal government has turned to student assessment as a means of asserting greater control over the country's educational system, specifically with The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reform (Menken, 2010). During the NCLB era, the quality of schooling for second language learners may have worsened rather than improved. Multilingual learners must take English proficiency tests that measure their language learning while taking and passing the same academic content assessments as those taken by native English speakers (Menken, 2010). Schools must also show evidence of student progress as dictated by the state's annual progress goals creating test scores as high stakes since failing to meet the progress goals can lead to school closure or the loss of federal funds. Hence, my research aims to advocate for better and equitable assessment practices that accurately represent multilingual learners' proficiency progress, give feedback to the student, and utilize the assessment data to inform instruction.

**Purpose and Rationale**

Adequately assessing second language learners is a field that is highly compelling to me both as an educator and an individual. As a former ESL learner, testing results shaped my educational learning experiences, which limited my ability to improve my native language proficiency level, and the opportunity to show growth in the English language. Standardized testing is a factor that requires a critical analysis of its popularity and dominance in today's education for assessing and tracking second language learning progress. High-stakes testing has created a culture where earning high grades is a must, creating educational inequalities among educational institutions. Susan Whorton, director of the Academic Success Center at Clemson University, mentioned that the grade point average is not a reflection of student learning but a reflection of student performance in the course's assessments (Claybourn,

2022). Nevertheless, grade-point averages are critical for college admissions, financial aid, and scholarships. Many K-12 schools and higher education institutions enforce the plus-or-minus (+/-) grading system to establish a distinguished level of excellence among their student population. While this rigorous grading system gives students special pride, it fails to attend to their cognitive and social-emotional well-being. Ward & Butler (2019) revealed that first-year college students with a higher Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI) obtained a higher cumulative grade-point average GPA in comparison to students with a low MAI. Metacognition is the awareness one has about his or her knowledge and the regulation of learning processes to meet the demands of particular tasks (Siqueira et al., 2020). Hence, students who develop metacognitive strategies can effectively plan, monitor, and regulate their cognitive process resulting in better academic achievement and motivation to learn. In addition to the use of GPA, having the plus-or-minus(+/-) grading system may contribute to a greater extent of educational concerns. For instance, the Federal Pell Grant is a need-based grant program that, although initial eligibility is based on the student's financial need, renewal is contingent on meeting the minimum academic standards. -including a Grade Point Average (GPA) requirement (Schudde & Scott-Clayton, 2016). Therefore, the negative impact of a minus on a student's transcript is nearly unaffordable for grant-recipient students. Such a minus can lower the GPA, putting them at risk for financial aid termination. As an educator, this issue needs immediate attention to better assist and assess second language learners' proficiency.  The plus-or-minus (+/-) grading system gives way to the mindset that studying to pass the test and earning a high score is acceptable instead of demonstrating language proficiency. Nevertheless, it is essential to bring awareness that making the "A+" does not constitute a high language proficiency level. I want to ensure that students learn the material to apply it beyond the classroom's confines as construction to their lives. Furthermore, I want

to explore the assessment area to shed light on best practices and assessment tools that provide second language learners meaningful feedback without being discriminatory.

**Goals**

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of performance-based assessments over standardized testing to measure language learning. The junior high school I will use for this investigation assesses the multilingual student population with the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners (ACCESS) test. As an educator, I find using assessment data essential for planning future instruction and providing measures to assist struggling students. However, the ACCESS data is not immediate, and testing once a year leaves no room to intervene right away. Therefore, this research aims to highlight the methods that teachers use and create to assess better the skills and language proficiency of the multilingual learner population.

**Research Questions**

In order to understand the types of assessments that appropriately reflect second language learners' knowledge of skills in a second language, the types of assessment practices that adequately increase language development, and how assessment data guide instructional practices, the following research questions have been developed to guide the study:

Research Question 1: What are the most meaningful assessment tools for second language learners that provide meaningful formative feedback without being discriminatory?

Research Question 2: To what extent, if any, can assessments better inform curriculum development for second language learners?

Research Question 3: To what extent, if any, can assessment data inform instructional practices?

Research Question 4: What type of assessments can teachers use to better inform instructional practices?

## Secondary Questions

1. How is assessment monitored at Kamino School District (KSD)?

2. How is assessment at Kamino School District used to further guide instruction and interventions?

3. How does the grading culture of Kamino School District affect assessment performance?

## Conclusion

As a world language instructor, the ACTFL standards guide the instructional and assessment practices in the classroom. The alignment is focused on ensuring that students interact in the target language in authentic and meaningful learning contexts and without the subjectivity to pass state-mandated tests to show their language proficiency in the respective world language as their multilingual counterparts. Advanced Placement tests allow students in world language programs to demonstrate mastery and receive collegiate credit. Yet, these tests do not pose the same high stakes for placements and school support nor the constant and annual pressure of meeting a specific score to exit from such programs.

In the next chapter, I will present a historical overview focusing on subtractive educational policies that produce inequities for the Latinx student population. The historical overview will be divided into five eras. The first era, titled Imperialism: Social, Political, and Economic Dominance, discusses how racial superiority ideals influenced the foundations of the first colonial colleges in the United States. The second era, titled Mexican Xenophobia, discusses the ways in which the anti-immigrant sentiment across the United States affected the educational experiences of Mexican American children. The third era, titled Contesting

Educational Inequity, presents various cases where the parent and student community demanded equal educational experiences and opportunities. The fourth era, titled Accountability and High Stakes Testing, presents how the increase in state testing oppresses the Latinx student population. The fifth era, titled Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, highlights the movement for schools to provide diverse curriculum and instructional practices that are equitable and inclusive to all students.

**Key Terms**

**Multilingual Learners (ML)** – Students who are learning English as an additional language.

**Standardized Testing** – A standardized test is a test done or produced in a standard, consistent manner consisting of a series of questions or exercises measuring skill, knowledge, and capacity in the English language. The school administers a standardized test, and scores inform placement and monitor student progress, per the U.S. federal requirement of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). A standardized test is scored automatically by a test platform or trained raters.

**Performance-Based Assessments (PBA)-** Assessments that measure students' ability to apply the skills and knowledge learned from a unit or units of study. The task challenges students to use their higher-order thinking skills to create a product or complete a process. The tasks can range from a simple constructed response to completing a task that closely resembles the responsibilities of a professional, for example, an engineer, financial analyst, or technician.

**Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR)** – The Illinois Assessment of Readiness assesses the progress of students in grades 3-8 in meeting the Illinois Learning Standards in English language arts and mathematics.

**Measure of Academic Progress (MAP)** – The Measure of Academic Progress is designed to target and assess a student's academic performance in reading, mathematics, and science.

**ACCESS** – The Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners assesses students in the four domains of the English language - speaking, reading, listening, and writing. ACCESS is administered annually by English language learners in grades K-12.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

**Introduction**

Latinx "education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was socially reproductive – an instrument for reproducing a stratified social order whereby the dominant groups in the society maintained social, economic, and political control over subordinate, racial, ethnic, and working-class groups" (San Miguel Jr. & Donato, 2009, pp. 43). This quote is central to this research for two reasons: one, the quote captures the reasons why bilingual education in the United States continues to present inequitable funding, resources, curriculum, and assessment practices for the multilingual learner population; and secondly, it highlights the profound impacts that imperialism has imposed on today's educational system.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the historical context of this quote by addressing how the educational system has produced policies that have served as means to eradicate, subordinate, and marginalize the multicultural and linguistic diversity among the multilingual student population in the United States. To present the negative impact of subtractive educational policies, I will present five eras in which social, economic, and political dominance has resulted in the continuation of oppression and subjectivity of the multilingual learner and Latinx student population in the United States.  First, the Imperialism Era; second, the Anti-Mexican Xenophobia Era; third, the Era of Contesting Educational Inequality; fourth, the Era of Accountability and High Stakes Testing; and fifth, the Era of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

**The Era of Imperialism: Social, Political, and Economic Dominance**

Human hierarchy during the 16th century in the United States became the blueprint for the establishment of the first colonial schools. Cotton Mather, a Puritan preacher who helped carry 200-year-old racist ideas from Europe to the United States by preaching on racial inequalities such as "if Black souls became Christians, their souls would turn white,"

provided the means for the foundation of early education in the United States (Kendi, 2016, pp.6). In the year 1640, he assigned Henry Dunster, another Puritan clergyman who consumed and produced racial hierarchy ideologies, to design the curriculum at Harvard University (Kendi, 2016). Dunster's curriculum selection of solely including Ancient Greek and Latin literature as the only truths worthy of studying at the institution set the standard for racial disparities and racial inequalities among the rest of the colonial colleges that followed thereafter. Puritans quickly became fascinated with Aristotle's view on human hierarchy and soon began to believe that they, too, were superior to any other race. For Aristotle, slavery is an essential aspect of life since he considered slaves as instruments that make life worthwhile as they lack rational power that is necessary for ruling or giving directions (Barker, 1946). Furthermore, Aristotle's natural slavery theory is based on the belief that "there is a deficiency of the reasoning part of the soul, thus leading to moral and intellectual implications making him incapable of living a life of autonomy and independence, in other words, the life of a free man. Hence, his best hope of fulfilling his limited potential is to serve a master" (Garnsey, 1996, pp. 114 ). At the same time, Aristotle invented climate theory to justify Greek Superiority, claiming that extremely hot or cold climates produced intellectually, physically, and morally inferior people who were ugly and lacked the capacity for freedom and self-government (Bethencourt, 2013). According to Aristotle, *"Humanity is divided into two: the masters and the slaves; or, if one prefers it, the Greeks and the Barbarians, those who have the right to command; and those who are born to obey. The enslaved are people that by nature are incapable of reasoning and live a life of pure sensation, like certain tribes on the borders of the civilized world, or like people who are diseased through the onset of illnesses like epilepsy or madness"* (Kendi, 2016, pp. 17). Aristotle's human hierarchy ideologies based on racist and discriminatory views led Puritans also to believe and justify their

superiority as their license to slaughter, rape, kidnap, and murder Native Americans and invade their lands for self-interest and self-gain.

"In May 1637, at the culmination of Connecticut's Pequot War, the English surrounded the Mystic River, opened fire, set the building ablaze, and then butchered 500 people as they tried to escape the flames" (Wilder, 2013, pp.34). The aftermath of the Pequot War shows proof of how the destruction of the marginalized led to more power for the perpetrators without facing any repercussions other than the Englishmen acquiring more power. The cruel and forceful displacement of Native Americans resulted in "free land" that paved the way for the expansion of colonial colleges, such as Harvard acquiring about two thousand acres of land (Wilder, 2013). Adopting Aristotle's racial views as the educational doctrine in early higher education became the instrument to divide the human race into two categories: the oppressors and the subordinate. Wealth became synonymous with power; both were deemed as given rights for the perpetrators to enslave and dispose of human life. Slavery represented economic, political, and personal profit for the English invaders. In other words, free labor, wealth, and power: power that influenced their curriculum decisions. Founding benefactors, board of trustees, and presidents of colonial colleges used their power to determine the curriculum taught, including the language of instruction worthy of studying and using for instruction. English could not be spoken as Latin was the language of instruction, but the white students were allowed to break the codes of conduct. This privilege was stripped away from Native Americans to use their native languages. Although Greek and Latin were chosen for instructional practices, English eventually superseded Latin as the tongue of instruction (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The English sought to correct the Indian's appearance, speech, and beliefs - a cultural submission. The hegemonic language of the Europeans displaced native languages and their attendant values and ideas (Wilder, 2013, pp. 28). Admission to Harvard required the ability to speak or write in Latin as it was competitively

grounded in the Greek language. However, the power bestowed to the board members resulted in overruling such requirements. "There were no written admission tests. Students were examined orally by the college president or the tutors. Students were sometimes exempt from one or the other requirement, especially because all the colleges needed students and could not afford to adhere too strictly to their written admissions statements" (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, pp. 29). Phillip Livingston, one of the several who started as slave traders and then appointed as a public trustee for King's College (Columbia and Rutgers University), used his power from all his slaving activities to assist with the highest enrollment of Atlantic traders' sons into the college (Wilder, 2013, pp. 67).

Aristotle's racist principles based on human hierarchy were the foundation of American higher education that contributed to the eradication of the linguistic and cultural diversity population who had been residing in the United States long before these Puritan invaders brutally and forcefully settled into their homeland. Manifest Destiny – the idea that God destines the United States to expand its dominion across the North American continent contributed to the belief in American cultural and racial superiority; belief used to justify Native Americans as inferior and Hispanics in the Southwest territory as "backward," to imply that they were so deficient in comparison to the white race (Independence Hall Association, 2022). The Monroe Doctrine engraved this idea even further by defining any colonization in the western hemisphere as an act of war (Onion et al., 2010; Drexler, 2020). In the next era, political, social, and economic dominance as presented in this era becomes the thread that links racism and racial hierarchy to educational inequalities among the Latinx student population in the United States. These racial views would then transform into unequal educational policies that have served to eradicate, subordinate, and marginalize the Latinx student community in the United States.

**The Era of Mexican Xenophobia**

History shows that xenophobia has been a constant and defining feature of American life that is deeply embedded in our society, economy, and politics that thrives best in certain contexts, such as economic and demographic change (Lee, 2019). According to Erika Lee, xenophobia has shaped American foreign relationships and justified American imperialism as it has played a central role in America's changing definitions of race, citizenship, and what it means to be "American" (2019). The Americanization Movement in the early twentieth century became an innovative way to force the assimilation and acculturation of immigrants and other races to the standards of "American" culture with the intent to promote patriotism and productivity (Nowrasteh, 2014). The movement devoted itself to English language instruction to sustain its goal, of devaluing and diminishing linguistic and cultural diversity. The movement's efforts, despite the righteous beliefs behind them, paved the way for English-only policies and school segregation to enact as weapons of oppression among the Latinx population.

In the twentieth century, school segregation increased in the case of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Racial hierarchy and imperialism ideals, dating back to the colonial invasion of the United States, created unequal and punitive learning environments for BIPOC students. In the case of the Latinx student population, schools served as the reproduction of racial and social inequalities. Schools, both at the local and state levels, used a variety of administrative means to segregate Mexican children as they perceived them as racially inferior to white children, thus labeling them as "language handicapped" (San Miguel Jr. & Donato, 2009, pp. 30). As a result of this racial perception, Latinx students suffered greatly from the exclusion and distortion of Mexican heritage within the school's curriculum – including textbooks and instructional materials. The curriculum was diluted, and students were provided with non-academic instruction and training for low or semi-skilled

jobs due to the racial perception of not having the capability for high academic achievement (San Miguel Jr. & Donato, 2009). English-only policies enforced in public schools excluded and prohibited Spanish and other non-languages from the curriculum and were consistently repressed, discouraged, devalued, and punished. There was a sink-or-swim system in place that forced students to learn English quickly, however, if unsuccessful, students were labeled as limited-English-proficient, a label that further crippled Latinx students to acquire core content knowledge and equitable academic experiences (Flores & Murillo, 2001). Other measures that reflected the inequalities of segregated schools were teacher standards and facilities. Teachers were less trained, qualified, and experienced in comparison to the teachers in Anglo schools, whereas schools were typically run-down buildings with crowded classrooms that lacked running water (San Miguel Jr. & Donato, 2009; Ortiz, 2018). The constant racialization and exclusion of Latinx students from the same educational opportunities as Anglo students were the clear outcome of racial superiority ideals that remained prevalent alongside the Monroe Doctrine and Manifest Destiny rhetoric.

The oppression and marginalization of the Latinx community in the United States at the start of the twentieth century were subject to further subjugation during the Great Depression in the United States. When World War I ended, followed by the economic depression, nativist fears about immigrants taking away jobs from "Americans" flooded the entire nation. At the time, the German population in the United States experienced this anti-immigrant sentiment as English-only legislation forbade the use of German in schools, and although unconstitutional, the impact of such laws further damaged linguistic minorities in many forms making schooling a major casualty (Molesky, 1988; Flores & Murillo, 2001). Anti-immigrant perspectives gained more power, especially after President Theodore Roosevelt's speech on immigration he had given before World War I. In his 1907 speech on immigration, President Roosevelt stated:

*In the first place, we should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet an American and nothing but an American. There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn't an American at all. We have room for but one flag, the American flag. We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language ... and we have room for but one sole loyalty, and that is loyalty to the American people (Mikkelson, 2006).*

With this racist rhetoric, high unemployment rates, diminishing economy, and families living in extreme poverty and hunger, the Americans sought to hold someone responsible and guilty of such a deplorable crisis that threatened the prosperity of the nation - the Mexican population residing in the United States. Mass deportations and raids became the solution to eliminate the threat of the economic crisis, which led to higher racial disparities. Regardless of citizenship, anyone who appeared to be Mexican was deported to Mexico. Children who had been born in the United States were deprived of their basic human and educational rights when they were deported with their families. Approximately sixty percent of the children expelled had been born in the United States (Balderrama & Rodriguez, 2006). Additionally, the deportations posed limitations on the children's educational opportunities. While settling into another country, some children were unable to attend school due to the unavailability of schools and tuition costs that families could not afford (2006). Those who were able to attend school were scrutinized and discriminated against for not speaking Spanish and being too Americanized. Cultural identity inflicted major challenges on these children, who found themselves at the crossroads of not fitting into either country yet suffering rejection from both

countries. In the United States, Latinx students faced discrimination for their Mexican heritage. At the same time, Mexico discriminated against them for being *"Pocho"* – cultural traitors for speaking the oppressor's language – English – and ultimately ruining the Spanish language (Anzaldúa, 1987). Since the deportation efforts "failed to distinguish between longtime residents, undocumented immigrants, and American citizens of Mexican descent, this wasn't just a xenophobic campaign to get rid of foreigners – it was a race-based expulsion of Mexicans" (Lee, 2019, pp. 1). The displacement of Mexicans during the Great Depression is a clear example of how the oppressor continues to utilize its power to target, encapsulate and seclude certain groups based on the racist principles of racial superiority.

In the following era, *Del Rio Independent School District v. Salvatierra* (1930), *Alvarez v. The Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* (1931), the *Mendez v. Westminister* (1946)*,* and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) will highlight the ways in which Latinx and African Americans contested the inferior, racial, and discriminatory practices within the educational system.

### The Era of Contesting Educational Inequality

In the United States, there has never been a time, not during its colonial nor national period, when only English was spoken…Yet the idea, however erroneous, of a common language binding and uniting the nation pervades the English-only discourse (Flores & Murillo, 2001; Galindo, 1997). Such discourse also promotes the need for stamping students with labels like Limited English Proficient, English Language Learner, and English as a Second Language Learner. These labels imply deficits that continue to transmit the idea of intellectual inferiority instead of embracing linguistic diversity as an asset. Unsurprisingly, the idea of one nation, one language acts as the enabler of discrimination against Latinx students for their linguistic and cultural abilities. After World War II, intelligence and standardized testing maintained their prevalence in classifying Latinx children not only on

their intellect but on language and aptitude (San Miguel Jr. & Donato, 2009). According to Valencia (1999), the testing of Mexican-American students can be characterized into the following three categories: one, the supposed intellectual, genetic, and biological inferiority of Mexican-Americans; two, low test scores equivalent to the differentiated curriculum for "slow-learners;" and three, standardized tests have flourished despite the cultural biases inherent in the tests. Intelligence and standardized testing results were yet another tools for marginalizing the Mexican-American student population through segregation and limited educational opportunities simply by labeling them as educationally retarded (Donato, 1997, p. 29; Sanchez, 1997, p. 129).

School segregation, educational inequalities, and impoverished schooling conditions fueled the Latinx community to commence their struggle for civil rights. In 1930, the case of *Del Rio Independent School District v. Salvatierra* proved that Texas schools were illegally segregating Mexican-American students on the basis of race. A year later, the case of *Alvarez v. The Board of Trustees of the Lemon Grove School District* (1931), the parents opposed the construction of the new school for Mexican-American students known as *"la caballeriza" –* stables (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998, p. 375). In this case, the judge ruled that there were no provisions in the California constitution that allowed for the legal segregation of Mexican-American students on the basis of race (Tórrez, 2001). Fifteen years later, in 1946, in the court case of *Mendez v. Westminister,* the court ruled that schools had segregated Mexican-American students based on their "Latin looks" and Spanish surnames, and furthermore, gerrymandered to guarantee that students would attend those Mexican schools (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998, p. 375). The court rulings, favorable on paper, did not create equitable educational outcomes. De facto segregation increased nationwide (Flores & Murillo, 2001, p. 197). A decade later, proceeding with the ruling of *Mendez v. Westminister,* the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), where the United States Supreme Court

declared that racial segregation of children in public schools was unconstitutional, led the way for the Latinx community the pursuit to civil rights. In the Southwest territory of the United States, Latinx students resorted to school walkouts as a way to socially advocate for equal educational access and better educational opportunities. On March 5th, 1968, in East Los Angeles, students at the Eastside high schools walked out of their campuses in protest of the run-down campuses, lack of college preparation courses, and teachers who were poorly trained, indifferent, or racist (Sahagún, 2018). The walkout's motto - *"Education, not eradication,"* references the lack of cultural representation in the campus curriculum and instructional materials. The United States government passed the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 that same year. The bill proposed to provide assistance to school districts in establishing educational programs that included teaching Spanish as a native language, teaching English as a second language, and programs designed to give Spanish-speaking students an appreciation of ancestral language and culture (Stewner-Manzanares, 1988).  Again, despite the righteousness behind the act, it was not a mandate for bilingual education since education is a state-level responsibility. Thus, the federal government can only create financial incentives through programs, leaving it up to the states to set up programs that meet the federal requirements in order to receive federal funding (de Jong, 2016). The progress of bilingual education is ultimately under the influence of state-level and anti-immigrant sentiments that produce anti-bilingual ordinances. The county of Miami-Dade witnessed two parallelisms - bilingual education and English-only (Flores & Murillo, 2001, p. 197). In 1963, the first bilingual education program was created in Dade County as a response to large numbers of Cuban refugees arriving in the area. However, Miami Dade's demographics would short-change leading to the first battle of language wars of the 1980s (Castro, 1992). In 1960,  only 5%  of the Miami population was Latino, whereas, by the 1980 census, this number had risen to 41% (Flores & Murillo, 2001). The area's long-time residents felt threatened by the influx

of Spanish speakers in Miami-Dade County and the widespread use of Spanish in public

places. As a result, an anti-bilingual ordinance was passed in November of 1980 that

prohibited any language other than English, any culture other than that of the United States,

and that all county governmental meetings, hearings, and publications be in English only

(2001). The anti-bilingual campaign in Miami Dade was a model of future language struggles

within the educational sector that continue to drive the anti-immigrant sentiment towards the

Latinx student population.

In the following section, The Era of Accountability and High Stakes Testing, the urge

for maintaining school and student accountability created another discriminatory social

structure via standardized testing - a social structure based on and justified by an ideology of a

biologically determined hierarchy (Goldenberg, 2009). In this section, I will focus on the

impact of the *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* Report, released by

the United States Department of Education during the President Reagan Administration, on

bilingual education. In addition, I will discuss the ways in which this report sparked future

subtractive educational policies against the Latinx student population, such as the No Child

Left Behind Act in 2001 - newly adopted as The Every Child Succeeds Act in 2015, and

concluding with President Trump's anti-immigrant and racist rhetoric.

### The Era of Accountability & High Stakes Testing

In 1981, T. H. Bell, Secretary of Education, created the National Commission on

Excellence in Education to examine the quality of education across the United States.

Eighteen months later, the Commission provided a report titled *A Nation at Risk: The*

*Imperative for Educational Reform,* in which the Commission expressed its concerns about

such poor educational performance across the nation (1983). The Commission, perturbed by

poor student academic achievement, low test scores, diluted curriculum, low graduation rates,

lack of literacy skills, and poor teaching quality, demanded an immediate intervention to save

the nation's educational system. The report's opening statement: "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war," truly transmitted the desperation and urgency that the Commission sought for an intervention (1983). The Commission's recommendation for salvation was for schools to adopt more rigorous and measurable standards and set higher academic expectations. Nonetheless, they failed to offer any evaluation criteria. The vagueness of such accountability measures left states, schools, teachers, and administrators to create their own assessment plans. By 1990, most of the states had programs mandating assessments that included incentives for compliance and penalties for failing to abide by the directives (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Schools quickly began creating plans to implement assessments with little to no guidance or collaboration from state or local experts in the matter. As each institution formulated its own set of goals, assessment methods, and evaluation criteria, it was inevitable for all institutions to produce an equal accountability system (Ewell & Cumming, 2017). Thus, the programs often resulted in poor production of content standards that were unclear, lack of specification, or were too academically challenging.

As these state-level efforts began, federal assistance during the presidency of President George H. W. Bush and President Clinton aimed to remediate the situation. In 1989, President Bush convened a meeting with the nation's governors, where they agreed to adopt national K-12 performance goals to be implemented for the year 2000 (U.S., 2008). Continuing the momentum for state standards and school accountability, Congress passed Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, which required state academic-content standards and tests; and Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 which provided federal funds to aid states in writing content standards (U.S., 2008, pp. 5). Then, at the turn of the millennium, the era of

accountability and high-stakes testing reached a new level with President George W. Bush's enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 was a federal invasion of education despite its righteousness to support all students. With the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) enactment, the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was discontinued, imposing English language instruction and proficiency for all students while dismissing the student's native language and culture. As a result, the second language learner must develop high levels of academic attainment in English and meet the same challenging achievement standards as all children are expected to meet (deJong, 2016). For example, the Illinois Academic Readiness (IAR) Test is one of the state-mandated assessments that assess the progress of students in grades 3-8 in meeting the Illinois Learning Standards in English language arts and mathematics. The Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test is another state-mandated test that assesses students' progress and growth in grades K-12 in math, reading, language usage, and science. In addition to taking both the IAR and the MAP test, second language learners must also take the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS) test. The (ACCESS) test assesses second language learners' English proficiency in the four domains: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students must pass all four domains to demonstrate their proficiency in the language successfully, otherwise are subject to annual testing in the four areas.

In addition to the increase of national and state-mandated testing for the multilingual learner community, the No Child Left Behind Act also imposed severe limitations and disadvantages on school districts serving the Latinx student population. For example, the act constituted schools the power to enforce or create bilingual programs or resources at their discretion. Schools within close proximity of one another provide different opportunities for multilingual learners. For instance, in some schools, the student could be receiving primary

language instruction while a child at another school, only a mile away and in the same school district, could not even ask the teacher questions in his or her home language without being told, "Only speak English at school" (Tórrez, 2001). The NCLB contributed to the increase of these types of disparities as the act's goal for English proficiency and school accountability pushed schools to attain the benchmarks at the expense of leaving behind the needs of the bilingual student population. The irony of such an act that implied the inclusion and equal educational experience for all students is that schools that failed to attain the desired goals lost federal funding. Such penalties mainly affected low-income communities and low-academic performance school districts – widening the academic gap between local and state-level schools. Less funding for low-performing schools meant less educational resources such as bilingual programs, curriculum, and instructional resources, further crippling the area of bilingual education.

Nine years after the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the Common Core State Standards Initiative was established in 2010. The Common Core Initiative is a uniform set of K-12 academic standards for Math and English that every student is expected to learn and achieve at the end of each grade level (Lee, 2020). This initiative sought to help schools maintain equal expectations for all students. In efforts to continue supporting student achievement and improving the challenges and inequities that the (NCLB) act had produced for underserved students, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. ESSA's main purpose is to ensure that public schools provide a quality education for all students, focusing on historically disadvantaged students, by giving states a central role in how schools account for student achievement (Lee, 2022). Even with (ESSA), annual standardized testing continues to be at the heart of school accountability, setting goals for student achievement, and plans for supporting and improving low-performing schools. Once again, the irony of another act that promises the inclusion and equal opportunity of

academic achievement for all students continues to neglect the multilingual learner community with additional state testing in English proficiency.

In 2015, the same year in which the Every Student Succeeds Act was signed, Donald Trump kicked off his presidential candidacy with a speech that resurfaced the racist and anti-immigrant sentiment that thrived during the Era of Imperialism and the Era of Mexican Xenophobia. In his speech, Trump stated, "When Mexico sends its people, they are not sending their best…They are bringing drugs. They are bringing crime. They are rapists" (Reilly, 2016, pp. 1). Such racist rhetoric became dominant throughout his road to the presidency and during his presidential term. Such a political climate affects the historically marginalized student population - Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) as Trump's discriminatory and racial speech continues to propagate the idea of racial superiority. In the educational context, such discourse adds to the isolation and embarrassment multilingual learners face during testing. The amount of pressure for any student during state testing is exacerbating. For multilingual learners, the pressure triples as the additional testing they are mandated to undergo with the (ACCESS) test forces them to miss instructional time while balancing the embarrassment of testing in rooms away from the familiar and comforting learning environments they know. Due to the test's extensive nature in assessing students in the four domains of the English language, the test takes between 3-4 school days. During this time, students are pulled out of their classrooms and are excluded from their classroom instruction. Upon completion of the test, students are expected to return to their classroom and resume their classroom activities.

The Commission's concern about poor educational quality and academic achievement during the 1980s urged the nation for a more rigorous curriculum for students to attain English proficiency, failing to account for the needs of the multilingual learner and its long-lasting impact on today's educational experience for these students. The era of school

accountability and high-stakes testing proves that establishing academic standards for all students to meet while neglecting prior educational gaps, student needs nor providing the appropriate support, continues to oppress the academic potential of the bilingual population. In the following Era of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the parallel progression between racism and anti-racism progress is more than evident. Just as much anti-immigrant sentiment and hate towards others for speaking other languages and sharing different cultures and values as promoted by President Donald Trump, there is a force of leaders working together on building school communities where student academic achievement is paired with diversity, equity, and inclusivity.

## The Era of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Internalized superiority, internalized oppression, privilege, and subjectivity are four pillars that sustain racism (Hunsberger & Neal, 2022). Beginning from the Era of Imperialism to the present times, these pillars have served a purpose: to devalue diversity, oppress multicultural communities, and shame individuals for their cultural identities. The educational disparities present in today's schools continue to present challenges to the multilingual student community. English proficiency exams continue to foster the embarrassment syndrome in which students are ashamed for speaking their native languages or deemed inferior when in reality, they should be valued for their multilingual abilities. Nearly 70% of the majority of white schools report anti-immigrant harassment and yet only 36% of those same schools communicate to their students and faculty about the need to be tolerant and respectful toward immigrants (Strom, 2022). Such statistics are alarming and dangerous. Historically, anti-immigrant sentiment and hostility towards people who speak other languages other than English have been responsible for eradicating cultural and linguistic diversity. To counteract this type of lifelong oppression, the creation of programs and

movements are pushing for change in schools' curriculums as a means to authentically represent the stories and contributions of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

In 2016, a group of teachers in Seattle, Washington, inspired by the Black Lives Matter Movement, decided to organize a national Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action (Waxman, 2021). To them, their motive lay behind the idea that students should be able to learn beyond the important figures and events of the civil rights movement. The goal of Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action is to spark an ongoing movement of critical reflection and honest conversations in school communities for students to engage with critical issues of social justice (Teaching for Change, 2021). Due to its success, their small movement has now become a nationwide organizing effort that is urging for the implementation of Black History and Ethnic Studies as a graduation requirement in all of the nation's K-12 schools. This year, in 2023, the Black Lives Matter at School Week of Action in Washington D.C is calling for a Year of Purpose centered on asking educators to reflect on their own work in relationship to antiracist pedagogy and abolitionist practice, persistently challenging themselves to center Black lives in their classrooms (Teaching for Change, 2021).

The Black Lives Matter at School efforts to provide a diverse, equitable, and inclusive K-12 curriculum is what is driving school districts to participate in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) professional training. In 2021, the school district at the site in which this research takes place has employed a company that specializes in diversity training for schools across the United States to identify and eradicate systems of oppression that damage the school community. The district's goal in offering (DEI) training is to examine how race relations and oppression diminish the potential for students and educators to teach, learn, and lead. Although the end goal is to improve school policies and practices, there are some issues that need to be addressed. First, the purpose for introducing (DEI) training is not being clearly transmitted to all staff. Such absence creates confusion and intimidates new staff from

participating in the upcoming cohorts. Second, the district is focused on training the staff first before involving students and parents. However, not all staff are mandated to participate in the training, and due to the number of district employees, not all can attend the same cohort. Once again, the district is not communicating its plan of action in getting everyone involved, which transmits uncertainty and delays student and parent involvement - an important piece for truly emerging in a (DEI) learning community.

At the same time that the school district decided to integrate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity professional training, there have been positive outcomes in relation to the multilingual learning community. Labels like English as a Second Language (ESL), English Language Learner (ELL), and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) are shifting to different terminology that no longer implies a deficiency but highlights the student's multilinguistic abilities. In 2022, the State of Illinois adopted the term Multilingual Learner (ML) for students learning English, a term that is currently used at the school district pertaining to this study. Emergent bilinguals, emergent multilingual, and English as an Additional Language (EAL), are other terms that are replacing the previous English deficient labels. These changes in terminology are tilting the focus away from a deficit of English language ability - and toward the incredible socioeconomic asset that is multilingualism, including bilingualism (Yaafouri, 2021). Another positive change is the Seal of Biliteracy - an award granted to students who are proficient or attain proficiency, in two or more languages by high school graduation. The Seal intends to treat students' multiple languages as assets rather than deficits and protect the cultural heritage of students' native languages.

Inclusion is a major topic of discussion, yet the distribution of power sets a different reality for the multilingual learner community. Federal law mandates that after students have successfully exited an English language program, school districts must monitor the academic progress of former English language students for at least two years to ensure the following:

one, that the student did not prematurely exit; two, there are no academic deficits incurred as a result of participation in the English language program; and three, the student is meaningfully participating in the standard instructional program comparable to their English native peers (Rafa et al., 2020). Moreover, states have the power to define and monitor the multilingual learner as they find fit, widening the inequity gaps among multilingual and monolingual students. In this Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion era, Bilingualism and multilingualism are a virtue, yet our educational system tends to annihilate language diversity with English proficiency exams.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, the historical narrative began with the Era of Imperialism: Social, Political, and Economical Dominance - an era in which racial hierarchy and racial superiority ideals paved the foundation for cultural and linguistic eradication in the United States. In the preceding section, titled Era of Mexican Xenophobia - the same racist ideologies, joined with an anti-immigrant sentiment towards Mexicans, contributed to the unequal, deplorable, and segregated educational learning environments for the Latinx student population. In the third section, titled The Era of Contesting Educational Inequities, the Latinx student community advocated for equal educational opportunities via authentic and diverse curriculums that embraced their cultural identities. In the fourth section, titled Era of Accountability and High Stakes Testing - an era in which the nation's efforts to set higher student standards and expectations, and rigorous curriculums, failed to meet the needs of the Latinx student population. The final section, titled Era of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - an era in which students' social, personal, and cultural identity are valued is lifting the oppression that continues to oppress the learning and academic opportunities for the Latinx student population.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH APPROACH

**Introduction**

In this chapter, I will present this study's methodology and research design that focuses on the instructional and assessment practices for second language learning and development. The following research questions will guide the purpose of this study:

Research Question 1: What are the most meaningful assessment tools for second language learners at the middle-grades level that provides meaningful formative feedback without being discriminatory?

Research Question 2: To what extent, if any, can assessments better inform curriculum development for second language learners?

Research Question 3: To what extent, if any, can assessment data inform instructional practices?

Research Question 4: How can assessments better inform second-language learners' curriculum development?

Research Question 5: What type of assessments can teachers use to better inform instructional practices?

Through the combination of a survey and semi-formal interviews, this study investigated the efficacy of current assessment and instructional practices that monitor language development and mastery for second language learners. The chapter will begin by describing the methodological approaches that frame the structure of this research. In the second part of the chapter, I will present a detailed description of the study's recruitment process, participants, site, and data-gathering techniques. In addition, I will present a

complete description of the various sources for data analysis, including the strategies to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings. Lastly, the concluding sections will describe the study's limitations and ethical considerations in protecting the identity of the study's participants.

## Overview of Research Design

For this study, a blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used as the principal methodologies via three different mediums – an online survey and semi-formal interviews. These methodological approaches were selected to allow the study's participants to share their perspectives on the following:

1) Reliability of standardized testing for assessing second language learners

2) Appropriateness of standardized testing for second language learners

3) Effectiveness of real-life application activities for second language learners

4) Effectiveness of real-life application assessments for second language learners

In the preceding section, I will describe the procedures of each of the methodological mediums selected to complete this study.

## Mixed-Methodology Research

For this study, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research was utilized to fully understand teachers' and parents' perspectives on the use of assessments that monitor second language development and skills. When making data-informed evaluations, the researcher must put its intended users as the main priority. Doing so, "utilization-focused evaluators work with intended evaluation users to help them understand the value of reality testing and buy into the process, thereby reducing the threat of evaluation and resistance to evaluation use" (Patton & Patton, 2008, p. 43). Thus, the study began with a survey to gather the educators' and administrators' perspectives on the use of standardized and performance-based testing for monitoring language progress and mastery for second language learners.

Quantitative data collection via surveys assists the researcher in reporting on levels of

agreement (James et al., 2008). Gathering data from surveys completed by experts in teaching

multilingual learners were selected as part of the quantitative research approach to assist in

confirming or refuting the qualitative data. Numerical data stands solid on its own, but when

there is an intentional and clear focus aligned with the statistical information, researchers can

present the information to establish the urgency for addressing the issue at hand and provide

solutions.

In this study, the participants' perspectives and stories are vital as the study focuses on

investigating assessment and instructional practices that appropriately monitor L2 learners.

Therefore, following the survey completion, the teachers and administrator groups were

scheduled for individual interviews. Unlike the teacher group, the parental group was only

scheduled for individual interviews to share their experiences about using assessment

practices that monitor their students' language progress. The use of qualitative research in the

form of interviews is an adequate approach to draw conclusions and recommendations by

incorporating open-ended questions that will allow me to capture the points of view of others

without predetermining those points of view (Patton, 2002).

**Recruitment**

Understanding the perspective of educators who work with students learning a second

language is essential for learning about current assessment and instructional practices that

foster successful language development opportunities. Equally important, parents who have

children receiving L2 services within the district are essential participants in this case study as

their experiences will highlight successful teaching strategies for students learning a

secondary language. Lastly, school administrators and other subject matter experts will be

additional participants that will benefit the purpose of this research due to their leadership

roles in educational decisions that, in one way or another, can present implications to the second language learner community.

 The criteria set for the participants in this study were as follows:

1.  Educators who teach English Language Arts (ELA), English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (TESOL), and World Languages (e.g., French, Spanish, Italian).

2.  At least one year of teaching experience with L2 learners or at least one child attending the district

3.  Educators teaching 1st-8th grade level, administrators, or parents of students at the district currently receiving L2 services

For recruitment purposes, an invitational email to participate in the study was sent to the teachers in the district who work with multilingual learners across the 8 school buildings that make up the district. Parents were invited to participate in the study during the Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee, where I explained the purpose and rationale. Consent forms were distributed so that parents had the opportunity to understand what their participation would consist of for the study.

**Research Participants**

Since my district has a small number of multilingual teachers, I will only state the number of teachers who accepted their participation as a means to avoid any possible identification of my participants. The sample consisted of a total of nine participants, ranging from educators to administrators and parents. Six out of the eight participants specialize in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), one in English Language Arts, one as an administrator, and three parents. The participants work with students in different grade levels, ranging from the 1st to 8th-grade level. The variety of the participants' experience working in various grade levels within the school district makes them distinctive and credible individuals

to speak on the types of assessments that work best for non-native speakers of English and

non-native speakers of Spanish. A visual breakdown of the participants' demographics in this

study is shown in the figure below.

Figure 1.0 Participants' Demographics (Faculty)

| Participants' Name (Pseudonyms) | Race / Gender | Grade Level | Years in Teaching Experience | Role / Area of Teaching |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 1 <br><br> Ms. Toledo | Hispanic / <br><br> Female | $1^{st} - 8^{th}$ | 7+ | Administrator |
| Participant 2 <br><br> Ms. Bart | White / <br><br> Female | $7^{th}$ | 7+ | English Language Arts |
| Participant 3 <br><br> Ms. Page | White / <br><br> Female | $7^{th} - 8^{th}$ | 7+ | English as a Second Language |
| Participant 4 <br><br> Ms. Petrosa | Hispanic / <br><br> Female | $K - 4^{th}$ | 4-6 | English as a Second Language |
| Participant 5 <br><br> Ms. Rozell | White / <br> Female | $K - 4^{th}$ | 7+ | English as a Second Language |
| Participant 6 <br><br> Ms. Sath | White / <br> Female | $K - 4^{th}$ | 7+ | English as a Second Language |
| Participant 7 <br><br> Ms. Ferrán | Hispanic / <br><br> Female | $5^{th} - 6^{th}$ | 1-3 | English as a Second Language |

Figure 2.0 Participant's Demographics (Parents)

| Participant's Name (Pseudonyms) | Race / Gender | Number of students enrolled in the district | Grade level of students enrolled in the district |
|---|---|---|---|
| Participant 8 Ms. Sanchez | Hispanic / Female | 2 | 1st / 2nd |
| Participant 9 Ms. Pereira | Hispanic / Female | 2 | Kindergarten |
| Participant 10 Ms. Matos | Hispanic / Female | 3 | 3rd / 7th / 8th |

**Research Site**

All of the participants, including myself as the researcher, are currently part of the school district as educators, administrators or parents of students currently attending the school district. Kamino School District (pseudonym) is located in a suburban school district. Per the State's Report Card, the school district consists of seven total school buildings that serve Pre-K to 8th-grade levels. There is one Preschool, five elementary schools, and one middle school (Citation redacted for confidentiality, 2022). The student enrollment of the district is 4,741. The student demographics consist of 69% White, 20% Hispanic, 4% African American, 4% Tow or more races, and 1% Asian or Pacific Islander. The school has a population of 3.8% English Language Learners, 16% who are receiving special education services, and 23.5% of students from low-income families. Based on the data presented by the Illinois Report Card, there are a total of 285 teachers in the district. Teacher demographics consist of 62% White, 2.4% Hispanic, 0.3% African American, and 35% Unknown. The fact that the district serves nearly 5,000 students, yet only 6 out of the 285 total educators are Hispanic, is an alarming scarcity of Latinx teacher representation. This is a policy implication that I will revisit in more detail in Chapter 5.

**Data Gathering Techniques**

In this study the primary method to complete this study was the application of quantitative research through a survey. The second medium utilized as a part of the qualitative research was conducted via semi-formal interviews. Since the study's focus aims at improving assessment practices for second language learners, a survey was selected to collect the opinions on the efficacy of standardized and performance-based testing. Likewise, interviews were chosen to allow the participants to share as much information based on their professional experiences working within the L2 student community. From experience, asking colleagues about their opinions on standardized tests has led to conversations where I can express agreement and disagreement. At the same time, these conversations have made me aware of what others think and what others have proposed as solutions. Per Patton's evaluation design, both research methods would allow me to carefully plan for the data to be collected, organized, analyzed, and eventually reported and administered (Patton & Patton, 2008). For instance, generating a list of potentially helpful questions for the survey and interviews was created in an effort to commence interaction among the primary users of this research study (Patton & Patton, 2008).

**Faculty Survey**

An online survey was the method designated for acquiring quantitative to conduct this study. Surveys, with the Likert scale, are the primary example of quantitative data collection that can be utilized to report opinions and levels of agreement from a larger group of people (Caroll & Caroll, 2002). Due to the nature of this study, educators' perspectives on standardized testing and performance-based assessments are crucial elements for improving the assessment practices for second language learners. When there is little to no data as supporting evidence, solutions may not be as visible, limiting administrators to work on the

types of interventions needed. Data-informed evaluations promote the cultivation of ecology

change where the implementation of all three phases - data, accountability, and relationships

foster a community of leading change (Wagner, 2006). Hence, combining both qualitative and

quantitative data was decided for the following two reasons: first, to strengthen the validity of

the study's results; and second, to allow the researcher to learn about specific behaviors,

correlations, and effects that contribute to the structure of an effective accountability system

that promotes progress and change. For instance, quantitative data can provide insight into

internal accountability – the type of accountability that helps build trust among college

leaders promotes efficient use of resources, and holds all leaders accountable for their actions

(Kelchen, 2018, p. 133).

The medium used for creating the survey was Google Forms. The link for completing

and submitting the survey was sent via email to each participant. Emails were collected with

the intention of following up with the respective participant for further clarification when

conducting the interviews. The survey consisted of two questions and five statements in

which the statements required the participants to select the level of agreement of disagreement

for each. Employing the Likert scale, each statement was followed with a scale from 1-5,

where a score of 1 was a *strongly disagree,* and a score of 5 was a *strongly agree.* The two

questions and five statements included in the survey are shown in Figures 3.0 and 4.0 as

shown below and in Appendix D:

Figure 3.0 Faculty Survey Statements

| Statement 1 | Standardized testing is a useful method that informs instructional practices. |
|---|---|
| Statement 2 | Standardized testing is a reliable method for assessing a second language learner's skills and knowledge. |
| Statement 3 | Standardized tests are appropriate reflectors of students' knowledge in a second language. |
| Statement 4 | Students learning a second language learn best through real-life application activities. |
| Statement 5 | Students learning a second language learn best through real-life assessments. |

Figure 4.0 Faculty Survey Questions

| Question 1 | How many years of experience do you have working with L2 learners? |
|---|---|
| Question 2 | Please provide any information you would like on any of the statements presented in this survey. |

The first question in the survey was to collect specific information about each participant, especially to determine if they met the criteria of teaching experience I had opted for during the recruitment stages of the study. Statement 1 was written to collect a general perspective of what the educators in the study think standardized testing plays in informing instruction. Statements 1-4 were included with the purpose of collecting data with a specific focus on the assessment aspect of learning a second language and collecting the participant's opinions regarding standardized tests versus real-life applicable assignments and tests. Data collection via surveys can assist the researcher in reporting on levels of agreement and opinions from people (James et al., 2008). Thus, the rationale for creating this survey was for the following reasons:

1.  Collect data that would confirm or refute the participants' preference of using
standards-based assessments to inform instruction and monitor language
development and learning versus standardized tests

2.  Collect data that would inform the types of assessments that the participants
consider to inform instruction better and monitor language development for L2.

3.  Use the quantitative data to support the qualitative data collected from the
interviews.

## Faculty Interview

The interviews were scheduled upon completing the survey and were conducted in
one-on-one sessions that lasted up to 45 minutes in length. The interviews were divided into
two parts so that each session would allow the participant to share in depth about the topics in
question without being time restricted. The first session focused on the participant's
perspectives on the benefits of utilizing standardized testing to monitor English language
learning. In contrast, the second session focused on the type of instructional assessments and
activities that the participants utilize to monitor English language learning and instructional
activities. Thus, the following set of questions from Figure 5.0 and Figure 6.0 was created to
guide the first session and second sessions of interviews in alignment with the study's
research questions.

Figure 5.0 Faculty Interview Questions - Session 1

| |
|---|
| 1. What assessment tools does your school use to monitor second language learning? |
| 2. In your opinion, what advantages or challenges do these assessments pose? |
| 3. Based on assessment data, what type of interventions are offered to second language learners? |
| 4. What type of support is offered to second language learners? |
| 5. In what ways do you feel supported by your district in relation to offering support to second language learners? |
| 6. Describe any setbacks from your district in relation to the support offered to second language learners? |
| 7. Please provide any information that you would like to share. |

Figure 6.0 Faculty Interview Questions - Session 2

| |
|---|
| 1. What type of assessments do you use to assess students' second language learning? Why? |
| 2. How do you use the assessment data to inform your daily instruction? |
| 3. In what ways has the pandemic affected assessment for second language learners? |
| 4. In what ways has the pandemic helped assessment for second language learners? |

**Parent Interview**

To have a richer understanding of the use of standardized testing to monitor L2

learning, parents of students receiving L2 services at the study's site were also interviewed.

The parent interviews were completed in one session, and the following set of questions that

guided the interviews are provided in Figure 7.0, also located in Appendix F.

Figure 7.0 Parent Interview Questions

| |
|---|
| 1. How much do you know about the type of assessment practices that monitor your student's academic progress? What are some of the assessment practices that you know about? |
| 2. In your opinion, what are the advantages/disadvantages of the way your child's progress is currently monitored? |
| 3. What are your concerns regarding the type of testing used to monitor your child's progress? |
| 4. What type of assessments would you prefer to monitor your child's progress? |
| 5. Any recommendations you would like to make to your school about how your child's progress is monitored? |

In this section, I provided a detailed overview of data-gathering techniques for the two

data mediums utilized to complete this study. In the proceeding section, I will describe the

data analysis techniques for each of the mediums, starting with the survey and ending with the

interviews.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

This study aims to improve the assessment practices of second language learners through a performance-based curriculum. In order to provide an extensive overview of the types of assessment and instructional practices currently in place that benefit language development and skills, I will incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. In this section,  I will describe the analysis protocol taken for the two data techniques used in this study, starting with the survey, followed by the interviews.

**Faculty Survey**

Quantitative research via an online survey will be the first phase of data analysis. When investigating the effectiveness of standardized versus performance-based assessments and to what extent these tests impact instruction, considering the statistical significance and meaningful significance is paramount for addressing the study's research questions. Statistical significance can conclude the efficacy of an intervention, but it may not specify to what extent (Data Demystified, 2020). Therefore, demonstrating the study's statistical analysis's importance will be accompanied by effect size to indicate the extent of implementing practical assessments that promote language development and skills. Furthermore, the use of descriptive statistics and frequency distributions will help analyze the survey data into information that depicts a picture of the sample and provides a description (Tiemann & Mahbobi, 2010). There are two main things that need to be described about a distribution: its location and its shape. Generally, the arithmetic mean is the most used method of location because the mean of a sample is an unbiased estimator of the population, making it another significant tool for making inferences about the population mean (2010). In terms of the shape, the width and symmetry of the distribution help visualize the data to make general conclusions about the data set (Caroll & Caroll, 2002). For example, if the curve has a hump in the middle, its symmetry means that you have the most scores in the middle of the range -

referred to as a normal skew. A positively skewed curve, where the hump of the curve is towards the right, indicates high scores in the data set, whereas a negatively skewed curve, the hump is towards the left, indicates low scores in the data set. A platykurtic curve, where the hump is flat, indicates that scores are spread out, and there is no common performance. A leptokurtic curve, where the hump is peaked, indicates that scores are very similar with few differences among each other. Finally, a multimodal curve, where there are two or three humps, indicates that there are overlapping groups that differ from each other. Since the survey responses were gathered using the Likert scale, descriptive statistics and frequency distributions will be important tools for setting up the data's frequency distribution, graphing, and interpretation - three essential steps in data management (Caroll & Caroll, 2002).

**Faculty & Parent Interviews**

Qualitative research via interviews and audio recordings are appropriate for addressing the study's research questions. The professional experiences of educators who work with second language learners will be an essential asset to my research. This group will provide me with information on the types of assessments they utilize in their classrooms to monitor language development and share how they integrate assessment data to inform instruction. In return, I will use this information to better address the study's research questions with a comparative analysis based on the similarities or differences regarding assessment and instructional practices shared by educators.

Using an online transcriber will assist with maintaining accurate records of the interview responses and for coding purposes. In addition, all interviews will be recorded and saved in both audio and video files. Doing so will allow me to review the dialogues carefully and transcribe the conversations into written documents to later code for further analysis. The application of thematic content analysis helps the researcher identify common themes without letting their biases and impressions predetermine the data collected (Delve, 2020). In addition,

the use of coding for analyzing the study's data will help me identify commonalities among the participants, overlapping topics, and other non-anticipated themes. In Quirkos (2019), codes are labels for assigning meaning units linked to words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. Commonalities among the participants will contribute to this research by highlighting specific issues that affect the sample of the study. There are two coding processes for analyzing qualitative data - deductive and inductive. Deductive coding is a top-down approach where the researcher develops a set of codes based on the study's research questions or framework and then links the data to the codes. On the other hand, inductive coding is a ground-up approach in which the codes are derived from the data collected (Delve, 2020). In an effort to not let my biases dictate the analysis of the interviews, I will be completing my qualitative analysis with inductive coding. First, I will revisit the transcriptions and make annotations. Then, using the feature of the online transcriber that selects the terms most often said during the interview will guide me in creating the codes. Finally, I will link the data from the interviews into each of the respective codes created to present and interpret the results.

## Ethical Considerations

When conducting research, federal regulations protect the subjects, and researchers must abide by them to ensure ethical research and ethical protocol with their respective participants. As part of meeting the federal regulations applicable to the type of subjects selected for this study and guaranteeing ethical research, I began this research with the approval of the Institutional Research Board (IRB) and the successful completion of the Collaborative Institutional Training (CITI) modules. Maintaining confidentiality and privacy with the participants is a measure that will be taken seriously. The use of pseudonyms is used to keep participants' identities protected and completely anonymous. This study used an online survey and interviews to collect data. Therefore, all and any information collected from

the participants is kept private and confidential, and none of the information shared can be linked to any of the participants' real identities.

The informed consent forms provided to all the participants included a detailed overview of the study's purpose, what the study consisted of, and provided a clear explanation of their rights as a participant of the study. Per the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program, consent should begin with a concise and focused presentation of the key information that is to assist a subject in understanding the research, what is expected of them, and the potential risks of harm and benefits (Hicks, 2019).  The consent forms informed the participants that their participation was completely voluntary and that they reserved the right to discontinue their participation at any time, with no consequences. The consent forms also informed participants about their right to inquire about any concerns at any time prior or throughout their participation and were given the contact information of myself and the respective co-chairs of the Institutional Review Board panel overseeing this study.

**Limitations**

Excluding the student perspective was a limitation of this study. Including the student perspective on standardized testing could offer insight into the types of instructional and assessment techniques students believe to be most beneficial for their learning and academic growth. Despite this limitation, my study included multiple perspectives of different stakeholders pertaining to assessment practices for multilingual students. The study included the perspectives of teachers who work with multilingual students in K-8 grade levels, an administrator who oversees the multilingual department at all school buildings, and parents of students currently receiving bilingual support at the district in K-8 levels. Plus, the use of reflective memos provided a deeper understanding of the needs of the bilingual community within the school district.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I first described the methodological approaches selected to address the study's research questions adequately. Thereafter, I discussed the data collection and data analysis techniques to appropriately present the study's findings aligned with the research questions. Lastly, I explained the measures employed in the study to ensure ethical research for all parties involved in the study. In the next chapter, I will present the study's findings beginning with the survey, followed by the faculty and parental interviews.

CHAPTER 4: Results

**As-Is for Improving Assessment Practices for Multilingual Learners**

Thinking systematically about the challenges and goals of change in schools and districts call for Wagner's 4 C's arenas of change - context, culture, conditions, and competencies (Wagner et al., 2006). Context encompasses the organizational system's social, historical, and economic context, and its demands and expectations. Culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to student learning, teaching, leadership, and relationships within and beyond the school. Conditions encompass the external factors surrounding student learning, such as arrangements of time, space, and resources. Competencies encompass the skills and knowledge to think strategically, identify student learning needs, collaborate, and reflect.

The As-Is arenas of change, as it relates to the contexts, culture, conditions, and competencies for improving assessment practices for multilingual learners in public schools, contributed to the problem statement (Wagner et al., 2006). Multilingual students are assessed differently yet are held to the same assessment expectations as their native English peers. My research questions and mixed-method data results addressed each statement of the four change areas. Hence, connecting the four areas of change to my data results to improve assessment practices for multilingual learners is imperative. Below, I provide an overview of the arenas of change before going into more detail about my results.

Figure 8.0: 4 C's Framework (As-Is)

| Context | <ul><li>The school district holds the power to provide curriculum development, software, resources, and professional training.</li><li>Principals' beliefs and opinions influence the type of decisions and expectations teachers must carry out in each school building.</li><li>large majority of students are middle class.</li><li>Majority of the students and faculty population is white.</li><li>District's focus on curriculum development for all content areas is unequal/disproportionate.</li><li>The school district supports some academic areas over others.</li></ul> |
|---|---|
| Culture | <ul><li>The high level of autonomy given to teachers continues to drive staff to work independently, away from others.</li><li>Limited curriculum development opportunities for multilingual/foreign language teachers.</li><li>Foreign Language is grouped with Fine Arts. Teachers have complete control of the curriculum, and there is limited follow-up from the administration.</li><li>Limited focus on differentiating assessment for multilingual learners within cross-disciplines.</li><li>New teachers are assigned to a mentor (teacher at the school building), to help the incoming teachers with any questions.</li></ul> |
| Conditions | <ul><li>Limited time allocated for professional development in the improvement of Multilingual/Foreign language learning and teaching.</li><li>Multilingual teachers are grouped away from other content areas.</li><li>Unequal number of multilingual educators in the buildings.</li><li>Limited opportunities set to discuss diverse perspectives on the improvement of teaching and learning for the multilingual learner population.</li></ul> |
| Competencies | <ul><li>Limited awareness of the assessment practices for multilingual learners and limited knowledge on how to address specific needs for multilingual students</li><li>Limited opportunities for multilingual staff to collaborate with other content areas.</li><li>Faculty lacks the motivation to implement new things or be open to new concepts.</li><li>Some teachers are willing to help others and share strategies that work in their classrooms.</li><li>New curriculums for selected content areas (Math, English Language Arts, and Social Studies).</li></ul> |

**Contexts**

From my experience, one of the challenging aspects of improving assessment practices for multilingual learners is the use of the ACCESS test to monitor English fluency. All seven teachers reported that the ACCESS test affects the students' social-emotional aspect from the very start of their educational journeys. All three teachers who work at the K-4 grade levels reported that students are assessed in English as early as Kindergarten. These three teachers mentioned that students not passing such tests at this age affects their performance and confidence. The other three teachers working at the 5-8 grade levels reported that students become more self-conscious about not passing the test, which results in disengagement, frustration, and disregard for passing the test. The administrator also reported that when administering the test, students often do not even know what they are being asked and easily become frustrated. "The schooling of linguistically and culturally diverse learners should build on their strengths - what they know and are able to do " (de Jong, 2011, pp. 33). Unfortunately, the ACCESS test precisely operates to do the opposite.

A second challenging aspect of improving assessment practices for multilingual learners is the lack of teacher and student diversity. The district's teacher population is 62% white, with a 70% white student population. All six teachers and one administrator agreed that cultural and linguistic representation is vital for students' self-awareness and identity. Yet, the lack of cultural and language representation tends to focus on one language only, that is, English. Language is an important piece of identity construction because it is "an important medium to socialize children into the linguistic and cultural behaviors of their home and community" (de Jong, 2011, pp. 30). The administrator who participated in the study shared that the district's most recent change in replacing the label of English Language Learner (ELL) with that of Multilingual Learner (ML) is a step towards the direction of acknowledging and valuing students for their linguistic abilities rather than deficits.

A third challenging aspect of improving assessment practices for multilingual learners is the district's unequal focus on supporting the needs of multilingual students and staff. All six teachers and one administrator pointed out that the district does not provide a plan of interventions for the multilingual teachers to follow. There is no set model of research-based supports or interventions to best support the various levels of multilingual learners in the district nor professional development centered around the best practices for teaching multilingual learners. The six teachers mentioned that the types of support, instructional resources, and instructional decisions to assist the multilingual learner best are ultimately at the discretion of the teacher. All six teachers stated that this is an unfair practice for the students because the district not having a protocol for teachers to follow, and it creates disparities in educational experiences from classroom to classroom and from grade level to grade level.

**Culture**

From my experience, teachers in the district are well respected and trusted as experts in their content areas. In return, this high level of trust generates a high level of teacher autonomy, hindering opportunities to establish a collaborative working environment.  When seeking change, isolation is the enemy of improvement (Wagner, 2006). Therefore, the high level of teacher autonomy also discourages the teachers from pursuing collaboration with others in different disciplines and building a community of learning from one another. The teachers who completed the interviews mentioned that they feel strongly supported by their district. Still, they also shared that such trust gets in the way of offering professional development training. A teacher mentioned that teaching is constantly evolving, and regardless of one's expertise in the content, having opportunities to explore new strategies is a great way to keep all teachers up to date with the most effective instructional practices.

**Conditions**

Caseloads and teacher schedules vary according to each of the district's buildings and are contingent upon the number of teachers. In my experience, teacher shortage is an ongoing challenge for the multilingual department. At the time when the study took place, there was only one multilingual teacher serving the multilingual student population in seventh and eighth grade. The teacher mentioned that it is overwhelming for one person to carry the responsibility of two grade levels without having allocated time for teacher collaboration, lesson planning, and reflection. In the interviews, teachers mentioned that scheduling is a major problem that interferes with the time they spend providing support to their students. A teacher mentioned that due to staff shortages, she was split between two buildings resulting in less support time for the students. The absence of an administrator overlooking the multilingual department was another challenge the teachers shared in the interviews. The teachers mentioned that hiring an administrator in the multilingual department just two years ago has been an important asset. Teachers shared that the new role is helping to maintain vertical alignment among grade levels, providing guidance and support to the department.

**Competencies**

In my teaching experience, there is a lack of 1) professional training opportunities on effective instructional strategies for students learning a second language, 2) professional training on effective assessment practices for students learning a second language, and 3) limited collaboration among cross-curricular disciplines. The teachers interviewed shared similar concerns about the lack of professional training. As evidenced in my interviews, the teachers and administrator who completed the study mentioned the need for more professional development training for all content areas on instructional strategies for multilingual learners. The participants stated that doing so is beneficial for all students in the classroom. Another concern was the lack of inclusion and collaboration between the multilingual teachers and the

general education teachers. The teachers mentioned that it is frustrating trying to best assist the multilingual students without the support of the general education teacher. The teachers also shared that they are excluded from meetings regarding student placement and determining student interventions. Other teachers reported a lack of faculty motivation and willingness to go above and beyond. A teacher mentioned that supporting the multilingual student is a team effort, yet feels alone when seeking strategies to assist the multilingual students within the classroom best. The teachers interviewed also shared that the district places priority on some content areas over others. Most teachers mentioned that the constant implementation of the curriculum in Math, English Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science leaves the needs of the multilingual student at the very bottom of the list. As a result, teachers feel that they are not truly valued and supported by the district.

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to improve assessment practices for second language learners by investigating the types of assessments that best inform instruction and appropriately monitor language development. My data collection consisted of a survey, and faculty and parent interviews to determine what types of assessments allow the second language learner to show mastery in the English language that is accompanied by prompt feedback and details on skills that show student mastery or progress. All participants in this study are employed or are receiving bilingual support for their child. My data analysis was completed through the use of a mixed-methodology method to gather data from the survey and the interviews conducted (Patton, 2008).

### Teacher Survey

There were a total of 6 teachers and one administrator who participated in my study. All of them completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 100%. I had teachers provide their feedback on standardized testing and real-life application tests for assessing second

language learning and skills. In Question 1, I asked teachers to state how many years of experience they have working with multilingual learners. In Question 8, I gave the teachers the opportunity to share, in a written response, any information pertaining to standardized tests or real-life application tests.

Teachers used a scale of 1-5, with one strongly disagreeing and five strongly agreeing to respond to Statements 1 through 7. In Statement 1, I asked teachers if they considered standardized testing a useful method that informs instructional practices; 14.3% of teachers agreed, 42.9% took a neutral standpoint, 28.6% disagreed, and 14.3% strongly disagreed (Figure 9). Thus, about half of the teachers who completed the survey disagreed that using standardized testing is helpful in informing instructional practices. An observation from Statement 1 is that more than half of the teachers did not take a stand on using standardized testing as a useful method for informing instruction. This urged me during the interview phase to find out to what extent standardized testing is a valuable method that guides future instruction and investigate how educators combine test scores with other forms of instructional practices.

**Figure 9.0** Participants' Perceptions of Standardized Testing to Inform Instruction



1) Standardized testing is a useful method that informs instructional practices.
7 responses
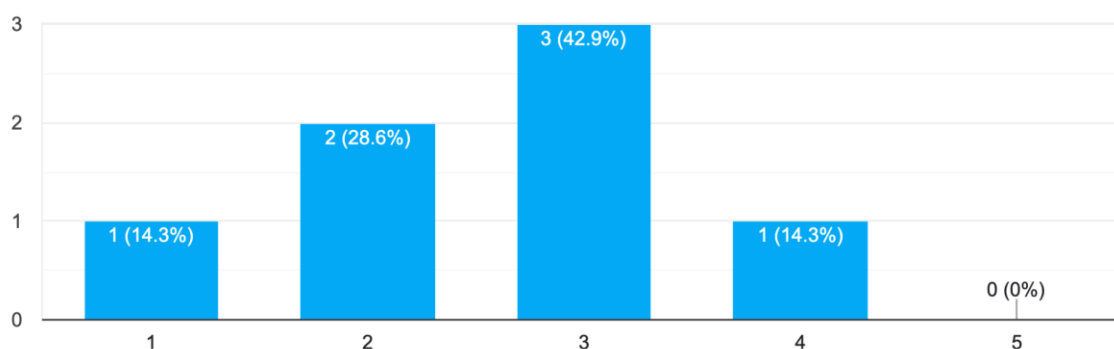
In Statement 2, I asked teachers if standardized testing is a reliable method for assessing second language learners' skills and knowledge; 71.5% disagreed, 14.3% neutral, and 14.3% agreed (Figure 10). Thus, most teachers agree that standardized testing is not a reliable method for assessing second language learners' skills and knowledge in the language.

**Figure 10.0** Participants' Perceptions of Standardized Testing for Assessing Skills and Knowledge



2) Standardized testing is a reliable method for assessing second language learners' skills and knowledge.
7 responses
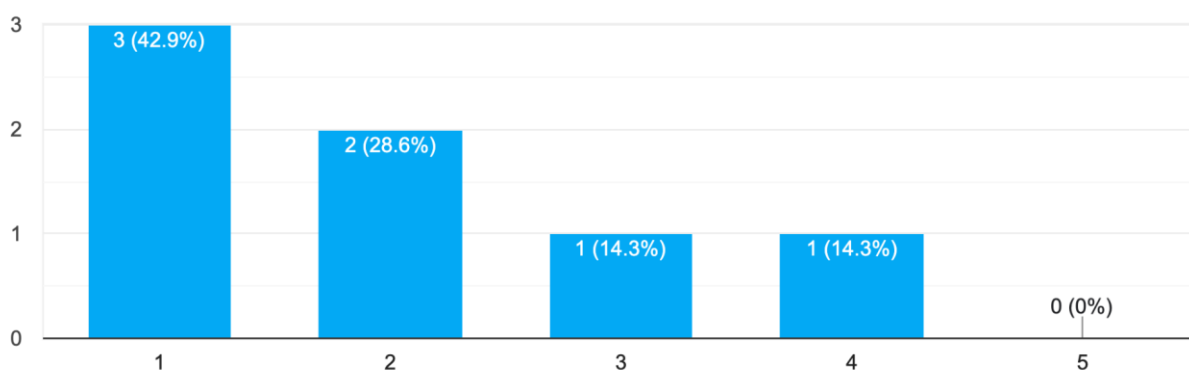
In Statement 3, I asked teachers if standardized tests are appropriate reflectors of students' knowledge in a second language; 14.3% disagreed, 42.9 strongly disagreed, and 42.9% remained neutral (Figure 11). An observation from Statements 2 and 3 is that both statements specifically aimed to seek the participant's perspective on standardized testing as adequate reflectors of students' knowledge and as a reliable method for assessing second language learners. The fact that the results for Statements 2 and 3 were similar indicates that all teachers agreed that standardized tests are poor indicators of second language learners' abilities and are not dependable methods for assessing language development and skills.

**Figure 11.0** Participants' Perceptions of Standardized Testing for Reflecting Student Knowledge in a Second Language

3) Standardized tests are appropriate reflectors of students' knowledge in a second language.
7 responses
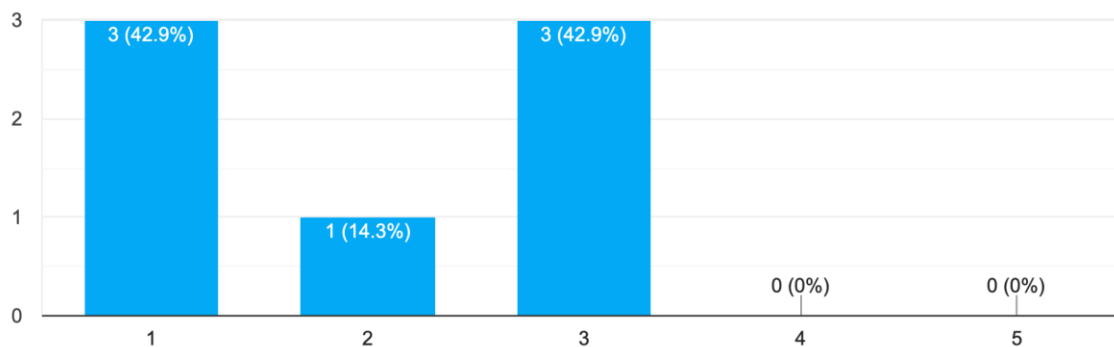
In Statement 4, I asked teachers if standardized tests offer prompt feedback to the teacher about the student's progress and skills when learning another language; 42.9% strongly disagree, 42.9% disagree, and 14.3% neutral (Figure 12). All teachers agreed that standardized tests do not offer timely feedback indicating the student's progress in the language and skills.

**Figure 12.0** Participants' Perceptions of Standardized Tests Offering Promptly Feedback to the Teacher on Student Progress and Skills

4) Standardized tests offer prompt feedback to teachers about the students' progress and skills when learning another language?
7 responses
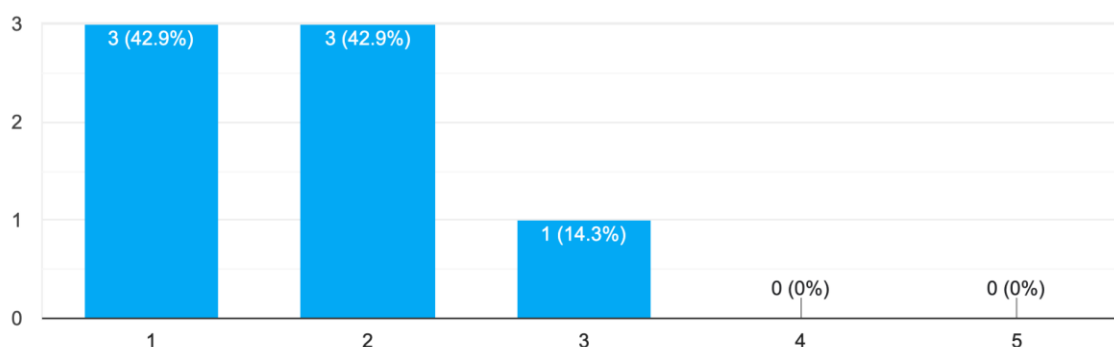
In Statement 5, I asked teachers if standardized tests offer prompt feedback to students about their progress and skills when learning another language; 71.4% strongly disagreed, 14.3% disagreed, and 14.3% agreed (Figure 13.0). Mostly all teachers agreed that standardized tests do not provide students with promptly feedback on their language progress and skills.

**Figure 13.0** Participants' Perceptions on Standardized Tests Offering Prompt Feedback to the Student on their Progress and Skills

5) Standardized tests offer prompt feedback to students about their progress and skills when learning another language?
7 responses
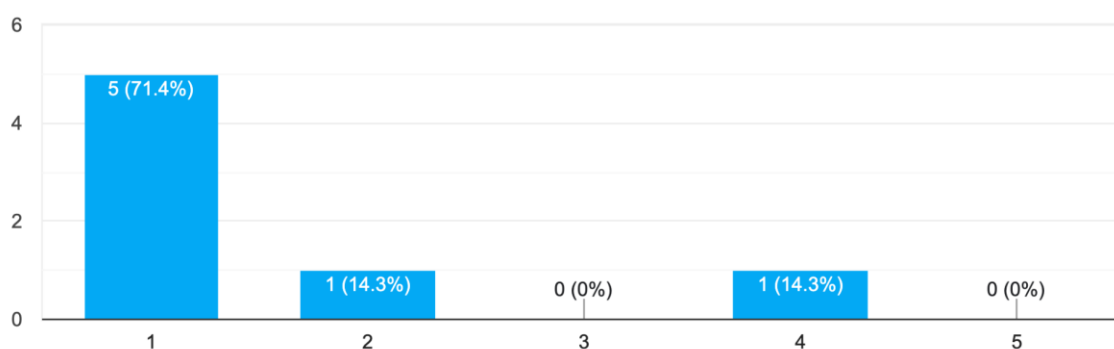


In Statement 6, I asked teachers if students learning a second language learn best through real-life application activities; 71.4% strongly agreed, and 28.6% agreed (Figure 14.0). Thus, all teachers agreed that multilingual learners learn best with real-life application activities.

**Figure 14.0** Participants' Perceptions of Second Language Learning through Real-Life
Application Activities

6) Students learning a second language learn best through real-life application activities.
7 responses
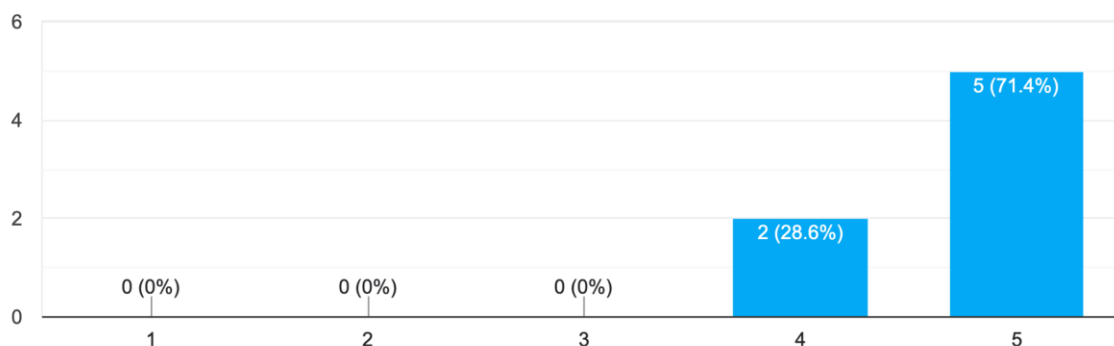


In Statement 7, I asked teachers if students learning a second language learn best

through real-life assessments; 85.7% strongly agreed, and 14.3% agreed (Figure 15.0). The

teachers who completed the survey all agreed that second language learners learn best with

real-life assessments. An observation from Statements 6 and 7 is that the bar graphs mirror

each other, indicating that teachers in the study who consider real-life application activities as

effective methods for multilingual learners also view real-life assessments as effective

learning tools for assessing multilingual learners.

**Figure 15.0** Participants' Participants' Perceptions of Second Language Learning through Real-Life Application Assessments

7) Students learning a second language learn best through real-life assessments.
7 responses
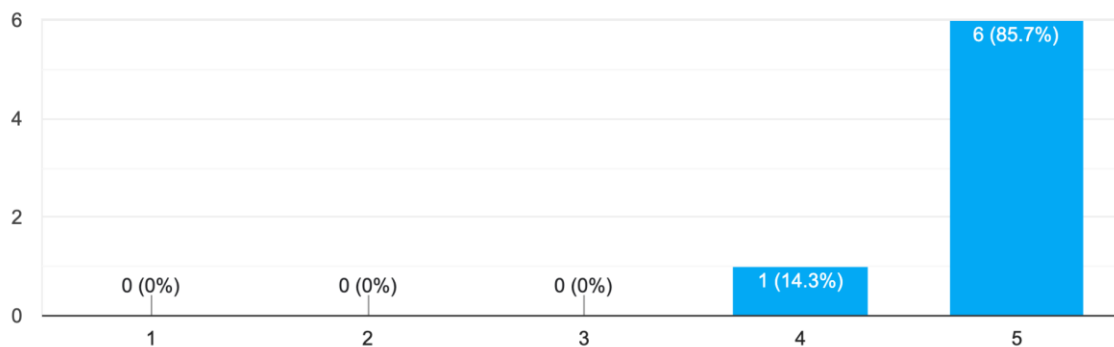


For the study's last question, I asked teachers to share any information pertaining to standardized tests and/or real-life application tests. This was an optional question, and 6 out of the seven participants who completed the survey provided an answer. One teacher responded, *"While many may argue that real-life application assessments are biased or can be loosely graded depending on how the assessor reads or understands the rubrics, language assessments such as ACCESS are often graded manually and can also be misgraded. Hence the district's ability to challenge scores."* A second teacher responded, *"Multilingual students often do not have mastery of academic English that is used widely in American public school systems. Standardized tests are largely written for fluent English learners who are well-versed in academic English vocabulary. As such, I do not believe standardized tests can be relied upon as a viable assessment tool with English learning students."* A third teacher responded, *"Using real-life application assessments can be useful to measure student growth and learning because the topics are relatable to the students, and students can pull from background knowledge in their native language to apply to their responses."* A fourth teacher responded, *"As a multilingual teacher, I scaffold my lessons and support my students. Standardized testing is useful in that it shows me what they are able to do all on their own*

*with no props, no scaffolding, and no pre-teaching. However, I do not think it should be used as the only measure of a student's knowledge of a second language. No one should be judged according to a single data point."* A fifth teacher responded, *"It would be beneficial to have research-based assessments, other than ACCESS, that provide a more accurate picture of an English language learner's true ability and growth rather than having them take a test like that of a monolingual student."* A sixth teacher responded, *"Standardized assessments are good for a starting point to understanding a student's skills. These assessments only offer a piece of the puzzle. If they are not coupled with real-life assessments, the full picture of a student's abilities cannot be accurately depicted. It is also worth noting that standardized assessments can run the risk of being overused to the point that they are no longer valid given such short intervals of time."*

Per the responses provided in the survey's last question, there are two main commonalities: 1) the implications that the ACCESS test poses upon the multilingual learner, and 2) the benefits of real-life assessments to assess multilingual students better. For example, the teachers reported that the design of the test aligns more with the skills and abilities of the native English speaker. Second, the ACCESS test scores do not reflect the students' abilities in their entirety, and the sole use of such to do so is not the most appropriate either. Thirdly, the overuse of standardized tests puts in question the validity of the ACCESS test. On the other hand, teachers expressed that real-life assessments allow students to show what they know and can do. Plus, real-life assessments present topics relatable to the student, encouraging the application of background knowledge.

Per the survey's results, standardized testing: 1) does not promote language learning and does not reflect students' knowledge in a second language; 2) does not reflect students' skills in the language nor the areas of strength or improvement in the language, 3) does not offer prompt feedback to the teacher and the student about language progress and skills.

Based on the survey's results, real-life application activities and assessments provide multiple benefits: 1) promote language learning and student engagement, 2) provide authentic and meaningful learning tasks to the student, and 3) provide timely feedback to the teacher and student about language progress and skills.

**Faculty Interview - Session 1**

I asked all seven participants who completed the survey to participate in a follow-up interview broken into two parts. All seven teachers agreed to participate in both parts of the interview. The first interview consisted of 6 questions, and the second one consisted of 4 questions (Appendix B). I gathered qualitative data to explore further the ways and to what extent teachers use standardized tests and real-life application assessments for instruction that allows multilingual learners to show mastery of the language and skills. I audio-recorded all interviews and transcribed them using Otter.com.

*State-Mandated Assessments*

In Question 1, I asked teachers what assessment tools their school building uses to monitor second language learning. All teachers mentioned the Assessment for Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS) test. The ACCESS test is a yearly state-mandated language assessment that helps gauge how much linguistic growth a student has made in a school year. This assessment includes the four domains: speaking, reading, writing, and listening. In addition to this test, multilingual learners are also mandated to take the following state tests - the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) and the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR). The MAP test is designed to target a student's academic performance in mathematics, reading, and science. MAP adjusts the difficulty of the questions as the test progresses, allowing each student the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge in the content area. The IAR test evaluates the

progress of students in grades 3-8 in meeting the Illinois Learning Standards in English language arts and mathematics.

### *Advantages to State-Mandated Assessments*

In Question 2, when I asked about the advantages and disadvantages of these assessments. According to Mrs. Bart (pseudonym), *"Out of all tests, the MAP test proves to be more helpful in monitoring student learning and modifying instruction to assist students better. The MAP test takes place three times a year, and teachers can see the scores just 24 hours after the student completes the test. Due to the timeliness of these scores, teachers can make the appropriate changes to support student learning."*

According to Mrs. Page (pseudonym), *"These assessments are valuable to help determine services for students who are new to our district. They are also able to show growth for many students, particularly younger students or newcomers. These tests give a broad picture of the language domains each student can focus on for differentiated instruction."*

According to Mrs. Sath (pseudonym), an advantage of the ACCESS test "*is that it covers all four domains in the language to shows where the student is at, is a good starting point for the teacher to better understand the needs of the multilingual learner."*

According to Mrs. Ferrán (pseudonym), "*another advantage of ACCESS is that for incoming students coming from other states, retrieving the data is easier, saving time on rescreening the student."* In terms of the MAP test, Mrs. Ferrán uses the data to help her determine the types of interventions or instructional supplements.

According to Mrs. Rozell (pseudonym), assessments like ACCESS can be *"helpful in the way that students can show what they can do without the teacher's intervention. Our instruction with ELLs is guided…we are with small groups of students or one-on-one, so there is a lot of guided learning. With ACCESS, I cannot activate background knowledge, preview*

*vocabulary, or even preview what the content is, so letting the students complete this task on their own lets us see what they can do without our intervention."*

According to Mrs. Toledo (pseudonym), a benefit of using assessment data is that the district uses the initial screener as their baseline data and compares it to the ACCESS scores to see if there is any student growth. However, Mrs. Toledo mentioned, *"For newcomers, or students who don't have any knowledge in the language, the test does not show what they can do in the classroom. Annual testing may be too much as learning English takes more than just a year, so focusing on the test scores may not be the best idea to see student growth."*

### Challenges to State-Mandated Assessments

Mrs. Bart stated, "*tests like the IAR administered once a year and whose scores are not released until the following academic year obstruct any possibilities for enriching learning experiences and instruction."* As for the ACCESS test, Mrs. Bart stated that *"the English Language Arts Department does not have access to the scores, which creates a high level of uncertainty for the teacher as there is no way of knowing how to best assist the student in the classroom."*

Mrs. Ferrán stated the difficulty of the ACCESS test as a major challenge. *"I honestly don't think that a native speaker of English would pass the test if they were to take it. The test is very long because each language domain covers the language of different content areas. For example, students get Science prompts where they have to speak their answers. In my opinion, you need to have some background knowledge of that content in addition to speaking the language."* Mrs. Ferrán also stated that the ACCESS test is not necessarily assessing language, but assesses the content, adding to the level of difficulty. Another challenge Mrs. Ferrán mentioned is the prolonged waiting time of test scores. "*I haven't got the results for months. For example, my newcomer from the Philippines took the ACCESS test in February,*

*and by the time I received the scores, it was nearly the end of the school year. By then, it was*

*a bit late because I was unable to use the data to help the student meet his proficiency level."*

According to Mrs. Rozell, a major setback of the ACCESS test is that it takes place

once a year, and it takes a long time to get the results back. *"Another big setback is that it is*

*very heavily technology-oriented, which our students are getting better at, especially after the*

*pandemic. But, it seems as part of the ACCESS test is testing how well students can navigate*

*the technology - especially when it comes to the speaking portion. It is incredibly unnatural*

*for them to speak into a headset. To have their entire speaking score hinge upon speaking not*

*even to a person, which is really unusual; I think it is unfair, and it is not a good measure of*

*their speaking abilities. Under these measures, it is hard to know if it is a true reflection of*

*what they can do because I know I have had plenty of students that their speaking is good, but*

*they feel embarrassed speaking into the microphone."*

According to Mrs. Page, a major concern is that students may be incorrectly placed for

services when these assessments are the only criteria used for placement. *"In my opinion, they*

*do not tend to demonstrate accurate language learning growth for many students at the*

*secondary level, particularly students who have been labeled long-term language learners.*

*Students feel great frustration when they are living their lives in English (often as native,*

*monolingual speakers) and a test continues to "show" that they are not fluent in their*

*dominant language. These assessments do not clearly depict the whole student as an*

*individual building on various linguistic repertoires."* Mrs. Page also stated that the ACCESS

data does not provide specific data to help plan for instruction. *"When working in person with*

*a student who has been labeled ELL by the state, it is easy to quickly see which content areas*

*they excel in and which they are less motivated to engage in. On the ACCESS test, students*

*are assessed in utilizing language for content-specific purposes. However, no data is shared*

*on which content area was most difficult for the student. If a student excelled in listening in*

*the disciplines of English and Social Studies but struggled to comprehend language related to mathematics, this would show as a lower listening score and not as a discipline-specific need. For example, an educator can see that a student is scoring lowest in a certain domain, but no additional data is provided. If a student scores lowest in the speaking domain, an educator can not see if the student had difficulty at the discourse, sentence, or word/phrase levels. This makes it difficult to address the following concerns…does this student need additional instruction/support in constructing extended responses using appropriate formats for an authentic audience (in math, science, social studies, etc.)? Would the student benefit from additional vocabulary instruction and practice? These assessments do not provide any data to guide individualized instruction within a language domain. In addition, the ACCESS assessment does not provide a measurement of growth in the key uses. It doesn't show if a student excels at writing a narration but needs more support in argumentation. This data is not provided with the ACCESS assessment."* Lastly, she concluded that these *"assessments could not exclusively isolate and measure language ability. Data may also be affected by and reflect engagement, motivation, a learning disability, etc."*

Mrs. Sath, mentioned several implications about the ACCESS test. One being that the test *"defeats the students emotionally."* Secondly, she stated that the scores poorly represent the students' abilities. *"I have students who sit there confused and resort to guessing. Sometimes they are good guessers, and they get good scores."* Finally, Mrs. Sath stated that administering the test subtracts instructional opportunities for students to continue practicing their language skills.

Mrs. Toledo shared similar concerns as the ones expressed by the other teachers. One of the main challenges she described in the ACCESS test is witnessing how the test is socially-emotionally detrimental to the student's performance. For example, in one of her classroom visits, she witnessed a kindergartener crying because he could not finish the test

and as a result, was going to miss an art activity - something he really enjoyed. In Mrs. Toledo's own words, *"I sat with him in the hallway, as he was sitting there just sobbing because he had no idea what the verbal instructions were asking him what to do. The instructions are read aloud in kindergarten by clicking on the microphone icon. Still, the student felt so overwhelmed that he didn't know what to do and felt left out for not participating in the activities with his class. In complete desperation, the boy began guessing and randomly selecting answers, all so he could finish with the test."* Mrs. Toledo mentioned that such circumstances occur frequently, and the fact that students are guessing just to finish affects the reliability and accuracy of the ACCESS data. This is why Mrs. Toledo strongly believes that assessing children at such a young age may not be beneficial and perhaps could be scheduled once they have a few years of practicing and learning the English language. *"Maybe by the time they are in third grade, they probably have enough knowledge and maybe the English language that they obviously did not have in Kindergarten. But with the assessment protocols currently in place, waiting to assess students at this point is already too late - as they have already been labeled ELL."* The third implication that Mrs. Toledo shared about the use of the ACCESS test is economical. *"Teachers, in some districts, are hesitant to ask their principal to challenge some of the students' test scores as doing so could lead to a state audit that can result in loss of funds for the school. In my previous district, my principal would get upset when a student would successfully exit the program because that meant less money for the school's budget. So it is all business."*

    Mrs. Petrosa discussed three major areas of concern regarding the ACCESS test. One that ACCESS assesses content and language simultaneously. *"This year, my colleagues and I noticed that the fourth-grade ACCESS test included a lot of Math and other subjects that require students to have knowledge about the subject's respective vocabulary. I guess we have to talk about fractions and how to write about fractions. This is frustrating, especially during*

*the first semester, because so many things are going on - getting the students up to speed, building background knowledge, and prepping for the ACCESS test. Sometimes, we have not covered certain topics by the testing dates, making it unfair to assess students on something that the class has not covered yet."* Mrs. Petrosa also shared her concern about the delay that it takes for the test scores to be released. *"My fourth graders usually take the ACCESS test in mid-January or early February, yet the scores are not received until August. By then, the data is outdated. It is too late to intervene. In other cases, where students leave the district, this data is useless."* Student embarrassment was the third concern that Mrs. Petrosa discussed in her response. *"I think as you get to third and fourth grade, students start getting a little bit more embarrassed about being pulled out to take the ACCESS test. Students begin associating this part of the process as embarrassing - a feeling that affects the student's performance as they do not want to be in the testing room away from their classmates."*

An observation based on the teacher's responses is that, unlike the MAP test, the IAR and ACCESS tests were regarded as problematic for failing to provide specific feedback, timely test scores, and reliable data reflecting students' growth in English.

### *Interventions & Supports for the Multilingual Learner*

In Question 3 and Question 4, I asked teachers what type of interventions or supports are offered to second language learners based on the state-assessment data. All teachers mentioned the following type of interventions and supports: English Language Learner (ELL) services and Response to Intervention (RTI) services. Students must qualify before receiving such services based on the Home Language Survey. At the time of student enrollment, parents must complete the survey that includes two questions regarding languages spoken at home. One of the questions asks parents if another language other than English is spoken at home. The second question asks parents if the students speak another language other than English. If a parent selects yes to either or both of the questions, the student automatically qualifies for

ELL services. Of course, parents can accept or decline the services, yet regardless of their decision, the student will be mandated to take the ACCESS test by state law. In 2017, the ACCESS 2.0 test was amended to align with college and career readiness standards and to comply with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in identifying a uniform exit procedure (Helfer, 2017). Therefore, per the recommendation of the Illinois Advisory Council of Bilingual Education (IACBE), the Illinois Board of Education (ISBE) adopted the recommendation of a composite score of 4.8 to exit the ACCESS test. Students who score lower than a 4.8 are thus labeled as ESL or ELL and consequently mandated to take the ACCESS test annually.

Mrs. Petrosa said, *"The goal is to place students with a certified ESL teacher and classroom that will further support the needs of the student, yet that is not always the case, especially for multilingual students moving into the district mid-year or spring term. Instead of following the ESL teacher's recommendations, these students are often placed in the classroom with the lowest number of students."* From her experience working as the RTI specialist before becoming an ML teacher, she also discussed the purposes for each of the three RTI tiers offered to multilingual students and the multilingual services. *"Tier 1 is done in the classroom with supplemental instructional support provided by the classroom teacher. Tier 2 would be with the RTI teacher, where additional support services in reading are provided in small groups. And then for students who are really struggling and not making progress in Tier 2 are then moved up to Tier 3, where the instructional supports are individualized based on the students' needs.*

According to Mrs. Page, the challenge with RTI interventions is that *"for newcomers, English is completely new, and RTI is not even available at a level that would be helpful for them."* Additionally, Mrs. Petrosa stated, *"Not all teachers understand the time and progression of the RTI interventions, and for students who cannot even read, relying on such*

*support is not sufficient. For the classroom teacher in Tier One, reteaching subjects and meeting the students' deficits is time-consuming and not always possible."* Mrs. Rozell also shared that *"pulling students out of their classroom for Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions may not help the student if the student does not have enough knowledge in the English language. Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are in English and provided by an English-speaking interventionist. Sometimes the student does not have enough language. For example, if they ask the student to look at a balloon picture and respond with what letter it starts with, the student could think of the word 'globo' instead of a balloon. Perhaps the student just needs more time in the classroom to have the exposure before placing him or her into the higher Tiers."*

In addition to RTI interventions, the district provides ELL services in the form of pull-out and push-in instructional models where a multilingual teacher provides additional support to the multilingual learner. Mrs. Page described that *"for a newcomer, these supports may include instruction in the student's native/home language and/or translation of classroom materials. As the student's knowledge of the English language grows, the ML teacher will continue to lower the linguistic load as needed to ensure comprehensible input and scaffolds for expressive language. These supports might include providing realia and visual representations, simplifying sentence structures, written representation of spoken language (such as when explaining the steps of a project), sentence stems/frames, etc. An assignment or assessment format might also be modified to support a student's demonstration of understanding of a content area concept. For example, if classmates are reading an argumentative text and searching for examples of claims and counterclaims, a multilingual student's assignment may be modified into a sorting activity in order to lower the linguistic load. Rather than reading the text in its entirety repeatedly, the claim and counterclaim (and some other sentences from the text) may be provided to the student on slips of paper to sort into their respective categories. This modification allows the student to demonstrate their*

*understanding of the lesson's objective without being overloaded with too much language input."* For Mrs. Page, families benefit from having a multilingual specialist in the building who can understand their needs.

Mrs. Ferrán added that *"the push-in model allows the multilingual teacher to provide the classroom teacher with a variety of interventions or supports that they may not be aware of due to their limited knowledge or exposure to ELL strategies."* Mrs. Ferrán also mentioned that pull-out sessions allow her students additional time to review the material at their pace and pay closer attention to the areas of strength and growth.

Mrs. Petrosa said that by doing a combination of push-in and pull-out sessions, she is able to attend to her students' needs without being completely detached from the classroom and instructional routine of her students. *"Building a relationship with the classroom teacher is paramount for supporting my students because working with them in isolation makes it harder for them to learn as they begin to feel disconnected from their peers and teacher. Plus, it strengthens collaboration, essential for planning individualized support for multilingual students."*

An observation from this question is that although the ACCESS test is the primary tool for the assessment of multilingual learners in the district, all teachers referenced the usefulness of having the MAP test's data to provide instructional interventions and support.

### Supports for the Multilingual Learner at District Level

In Question 5, I asked teachers to describe the ways in which they feel supported by the school district in relation to offering support to second language learners. Below is the breakdown of the teacher's responses:

All 7 teachers responded that they feel that their district trusts them as subject matters of their content area and teaching practices. Mrs. Page stated, *"I feel that my district trusts me as a specialist in the area of English language acquisition."*

Mrs. Petrosa said that hiring a Multilingual Coordinator for the district has been a major asset for the district. *"It was a big help last year when we got the ESL coordinator because she helped us a lot. The coordinator was talking to all of us individually and then organized our ideas together to give us a better picture. The coordinator also offered us new ideas and strategies to try in our buildings."* Mrs. Sath also agreed that having a coordinator has helped teachers better support their students. *"The coordinator has helped build stronger relationships, there is more collaboration, and sharing ideas amongst each other helps us try out different strategies for our students."*

Mrs. Toledo responded that a positive effort from the district is their push for more diversity. *"I feel hopeful that with the district's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, we can continue to serve all students better. It is a team effort, all teachers have to be on the same page to assist the students better, so hopefully, the district continues to offer these training sessions to all the staff."*

### Setbacks for the Multilingual Learner at District Level

In Question 6, I asked teachers to describe any setbacks from the school district in relation to the support offered to second language learners.

Mrs. Page responded that *"the building and district are beginning to listen and support the implementation of models that are least restrictive for multilingual students, but I often feel alone in my pursuits to implement best practices in relation to multilingual learners. Teachers are hesitant to change their traditional models of instruction."* Mrs. Page suggests that the district could provide more professional training in understanding and supporting our growing population of multilingual students. *"Best practices for multilingual learners are best practices for all learners. As a district, we must remember that all our students are language learners. All students are learning the academic language of each discipline, and*

*strategies used to help multilingual students access and utilize academic language will help all students to do so."*

Mrs. Petrosa said that *"There are a lot of bilingual families that are coming into the community, and I don't think our district is understanding the amount of support that these students need. I feel like we took a step forward with hiring a coordinator that is helping to get things more centralized and advocating for the multilingual students. Still, at the end of the year, the district took a step by saying that due to budgetary reasons, they would be splitting my role between two buildings - without realizing how this would impact my students. Once the district saw the enrollment of students, they finally decided to keep me full-time in one building, but it is so frustrating that the district waits until the very last minute for decisions like this. It makes me feel like they are not really valuing these kids or us because they are prioritizing budgeting issues instead of focusing on the needs of these bilingual families and ways for supporting them."*

Mrs. Toledo stated that, *"one of the major struggles that we have in the district is that the multilingual students and teachers are kind of second thought like we are always put on the back burner. For example, when determining the type of RTI interventions the multilingual student will receive, it is usually an administrator and the special education teacher - rarely do they ask the multilingual teacher about their insight."* Mrs. Rozell also expressed the same concern. *"It is pretty normal for the classroom teacher to have greater decision-making power on the supports offered to multilingual students because the students are usually with the classroom teacher, but there are so many factors to consider with ELLs, and those are not things that your average general education teacher is trained for to recognize or addressed. It is not their fault, but I just feel like this is something that our district can do better. Including the ELL teacher in the decision-making when it comes to interventions."* Mrs. Rozell added that the inconsistency of professional training for general

education teachers had been an ongoing concern. *"A big issue is that I haven't seen any effort by the district to get classroom teachers trained for how to teach ELLs. Some of my colleagues express that they do not see a need to train for just a few kids, but learning about best practices for ELLs will help general education teachers understand that a lot of the strategies will benefit all students in their classrooms."*

A second struggle Mrs. Toledo mentioned was *"coming into the district, it was an eye-opening experience to know the lack and absence of ELL training. Some of the teachers have not had any in a while. The mindset of the higher-up administrators sometimes contributes to this problem. When I ask for more training, I always hear the same response from Human Resources - these teachers are ELL certified and endorsed, so they know what they should be doing."* She also added that the district must meet the amount of professional training specifically designed for English Language techniques or practices per state law. Still, when they are offered, most of the teachers tend to be the same ones over time. *"I offer different courses throughout the school year, but the same group of teachers ends up attending these sessions."* Mrs. Ferrán also stated the lack of teacher professional development opportunities is a district's deficit. *"Our numbers are growing, and the student body is now 25% Hispanic. We need more professional training for all staff - not just the multilingual team- on the best teaching and learning practices for multilingual learners."*

Mrs. Sath shared two major concerns as a district. One is that the district is constantly implementing new tools, and developing new curriculum, without having the time to evaluate their efficacy. *"The district needs to do more research for tools that monitor student progress before introducing new ones. Sometimes it is overwhelming to constantly learn new software, tests, and piloting programs because they take a lot of time from focusing on lesson planning, instructions, and how students are assessed."* Building a cultural community was Mrs. Sath's second concern. *"As a district, we need to start recognizing the different cultures and families*

*that attend our schools. The district holds cultural events throughout the school year, but there should be more across all school buildings. The district needs to continue working on welcoming all families of different backgrounds."*

Mrs. Ferrán responded that a major setback is that the district does not currently have an intervention plan for English language learners. *"For example, if a student struggles with language use, the district does not have an intervention plan for the teacher to follow for guidance. It always comes down to the teacher and the teacher's flexibility to help. Teachers sometimes end up giving their preparation time or lunchtime to push in to assist these students in their classrooms. But being that there is nothing concrete such as a protocol to follow, it can be frustrating and overwhelming for the multilingual teacher to find the time to pull the student out or push in during their instructional time."* Mrs. Page shared the same concern and responded, *"Our district does not currently have or utilize any research-based interventions for English language learning. I have utilized programs with newcomer students in the past and may continue to do so in the future. Still, this intervention is not designed specifically for multilingual students and their English language development."*

These questions show that all teachers agree that the district supports their teachers. All teachers also agreed that the district could continue demonstrating their support by providing professional development training for all staff - especially driven to understanding instructional and assessment practices for multilingual learners. Second, all teachers agreed that the district needs to continue building relationships with the community. Third, all teachers agree that the district needs to be more culturally responsive in efforts to address the needs of the multilingual learner population.

**Faculty Interview - Session 2**

In The second session of teacher interviews, I asked four questions (Appendix C). The first two questions focused on teachers' assessment practices to monitor language learning and growth and how they utilize assessment data to inform instruction. The last two questions focused on the ways the COVID-19 pandemic affected assessment practices for multilingual learners.

In Question 1, I asked: What type of assessments do you use to assess students' second language learning? Why?

Mrs. Ferran responded that she utilizes storytelling and short response summaries to show students what they know. *"I like to have my students share stories and write short summaries to show me what they are learning and thinking. I usually do this through Flipgrid for oral responses or short written responses."* For vocabulary, Mrs. Ferran said that she incorporates the student's vocabulary lists from other content areas so that they have as much exposure to the words. *"We practice spelling and grammar daily. I pass out a slip to each student with a sentence with a prompt. The prompt asks to find all six spelling or grammatical errors. Students work on this for about 5-10 minutes. I set my timer, and it gets a bit competitive because the students want to find all six before the time runs out. My students love doing these activities, and for me, it is a quick way to assess my students informally."* Mrs. Ferran also shared that she uses interactive word mapping for teaching and reviewing vocabulary. *"First, I write vocabulary words on index cards, and on the back, I put magnets. Then, I draw a circle on the board and ask students to fit the words into the map. They work together to link the words by meaning. They add drawings or draw bubbles to group the words."* Mrs. Ferran creates rubrics for larger assignments so the students understand the expectations and how she would grade their work. *"I create my rubrics using the WIDA standards for English Language Development (ELD) and tweak them so that they reflect the*

*skills for the assignment we are working on."* WIDA stands for World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA). The WIDA English Language Development (ELD) standards framework provides a curriculum, instruction, and assessment foundation for multilingual learners in kindergarten through grade 12. The WIDA standards focus on designing lessons and assessments that support the development of all four domains of the English language: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Mrs. Ferran stated that using these types of assessments allows her to know where her students are and provide additional support. *"The ACCESS test is very intimidating for them, especially the speaking portion. Giving them opportunities to use FlipGrid for oral responses or narrate their Google Slides helps them feel more comfortable. The rubrics allow me to give them specific feedback on what they are doing well, and I can point out some things they can do at home to improve that skill."*

Mrs. Toledo responded that the use of electronic or paper-based student portfolios is one-way teachers monitor student progress and growth in the language. Mrs. Toledo described this assessment tool as *"it is more reliable. It provides faster feedback for the kids. Plus, the kids are more used to receiving feedback from the teacher already and are more comfortable making mistakes versus when they are testing. When they are testing, the whole setting changes, like the desks are spaced out, or even testing in a completely different room."* Also, *"the use of rubrics for assignments allows the teachers to assess the student's skills that are aligned with the WIDA standards and it is more authentic."*

Mrs. Page responded *"most of my students are long term ELLs, so they are doing very well in receptive language. Their listening and reading scores are very high but they struggle with speaking and writing. So I tend to focus on these two areas when I'm assessing students or language development. I use the rubrics aligned with WIDA to let the students know what they should be looking at to meet that domain. Depending on the type of essay we are working*

*on, we may focus on linguistic complexity, discourse level, or word and phrase levels. Rubrics is mostly what I use for determining student growth because it is closely related to the ACCESS test and students become familiar with the language of the rubrics."*

Mrs. Petrosa responded that when assessing for vocabulary, she *"breaks down the vocabulary lists into 4-5 new words a week so that students have the opportunities to use those terms in daily activities and show their understanding in weekly vocabulary assessments."* For reading comprehension, she uses the Reading Program (a pseudonym used to preserve the identity of the school), where every two weeks, students are assessed on their reading fluency and comprehension. *"These short reading assessments every two weeks let me keep tabs on where my students are and how much they are improving. It also helps me see if there are any areas that I can tailor to their needs."*

Mrs. Sath stated that speaking is one of the most challenging areas for her 1st-grade students. Therefore, she focuses on daily activities that require the students to feel comfortable speaking and listening. *"First, I start with vocabulary so that students get familiar with the topic. We focus on sight words in the book and vocabulary and use strategies to highlight or circle words they know or don't know. This way, when it is time for us to read the book, students are able to do so independently or with a partner. This has been very successful with the kids. The discussions generated from the start of the unit build on to the final part, which is writing. From all the practice the students have had from the readings and discussions, they are able to write their sentences using the sentence starters we have been using in our daily class activities."*

Mrs. Bart stated that the English Language Arts Department does not have access to the scores, which creates a high level of uncertainty for the teacher as there is no way of knowing how to best assist the student in the classroom. Therefore, Mrs. Bart resorts to creating rubrics and assessments that follow a standards-based approach when assessing her

students. By doing so, her students can self-reflect, track their progress, and work on their goals. As the teacher, she uses this information to discuss the learning progress with her students and understand the instructional opportunities needed. The following is a story that Mrs. Bart shared in the interview in regard to why she prefers standards-based assessments:

*"In the past, I would have students ask me what they needed to do to get an A. With these new grading approaches, students now come to me with the area they would like to improve, and the conversation becomes a discussion where both of us come up with strategies for making progress on the respective area."*

Mrs. Rozell said that she uses visual literacy as a way to activate students' background knowledge. Mrs. Rozell stated, *"I love doing visual literacy with my kids. At the start of a unit, for example, the water cycle, I will have a couple of real images of something related to water. Part of the visual literacy process is observation. I ask students to talk about what they see or what the pictures remind them of in the world or their own life. I ask questions about the pictures and then also make inferences. What can we infer from this? This strategy has been really beneficial because I can see what the students know, what they know about the world around them, and the vocabulary they are able to use to identify different things in pictures. After the discussion, I reveal what the topic is and explain the pictures. The students love it."*

In Question 2, I asked: How do you use the assessment data to inform your daily instruction?

Mrs. Farran stated, "Every quarter, I give students a survey on Google Forms. "*I have them rate themselves on a scale of 1-5 for each of the four domains and explain why they rated themselves that way. After reviewing their work for the quarter, I refer back to these responses so that the student sees where they are at and what areas we need to work on for the following quarter. I use their work as examples to show them where they are in each*

*domain and why."* Mrs. Farran said that these reflective assessments help her learn about her students' needs to individualize the areas of further practice. *"In some classes, we work on run-on sentences, and in other classes, we focus on verb tenses."*

Mrs. Toledo stated that when completing teacher evaluations, *"teacher lesson plans and student artifacts that they compiled over the school year allow me to evaluate how teachers are acknowledging different levels and offering support to these students."*

Mrs. Page stated that she uses state-mandated data to see what domains her students scored the lowest in and then plans activities to help the students grow in such skills. *"If I have a student that is at level two, I look at the description of level three per the WIDA rubrics and discuss with the students the differences between both levels. Then, we discuss some of the things they need to work on. For example, using more connecting words or using prepositional phrases to expand our sentences. This is why using rubrics is helpful for the students because they know what they need to do to move up from one level to the other."*

Mrs. Petrosa stated that frequent informal and formal assessments informed her about the type of modifications that would best benefit her students. *"Some of my first graders don't have the same background knowledge of a topic or at the same level with phonics, so making adjustments to the instruction is important. It requires more time, but using the weekly and bi-weekly assessment data helps me intervene faster and to the benefit of my students."*

Mrs. Bart and Mrs. Sath stated that they use MAP data to guide their instruction. Mrs. Barth said, *"using MAP data helps me understand where my students are and what type of support is needed. The only problem I have is that since I'm the general education English teacher, I don't have access to the ACCESS test data, which makes it hard for me to address the needs of the ELLs in my classroom."* Mrs. Sath said, *"I use the data to drive the instruction not just for the multilingual students in the general education classroom but in our*

*classroom as well so that I can support the teachers and help those students succeed, progress, and meet their goals."*

Mrs. Rozell stated that rubrics help her best assist her students. Mrs. Rozell said, *"For kindergarten, what we've done with writing, is we'll talk about what makes a good sentence, and they might say capitalization, periods, space, and the list goes on a chart which then we use as a writing guide of elements for strong writing. Then when I have them writing independently about something we've been learning about, I have them go up and check the rubric we have created together."*

In Question 3, I asked teachers: In what ways has the pandemic affected assessment for second language learners?

Mrs. Ferran stated that finding resources at no cost was difficult. *"There are great apps, but they require a monthly or annual subscription and most of that will have to come out of the teacher's pocket."* Another challenge was that "*students had a rough time at first since they were multitasking in a way… they were learning the content and learning to navigate the internet and using their devices all at once."* Also, *"technological issues got in the way, and students would show up late or be absent, missing out on the instruction."*

Mrs. Toledo responded that the pandemic had affected the students' social-emotional aspect. *"Some of the kids were quieter, less responsive, and sadly it was easier to go unnoticed."* Upon returning back to school, Mrs. Toledo shared a story about an undocumented parent who reached out to her and asked, *"Should I ask for help? Or are they going to take my kid away?"*

Mrs. Page responded, *"I think that the culture of growth as an educator doesn't exist in our workplace. Nobody wants to be uncomfortable or try to do things that they think are extra work."*

Mrs. Petrosa responded, *"I don't understand why the district dumped two new curriculums on us right after the pandemic. This school year is going to be crazy because everyone is trying to learn all the new curriculum, plus getting these kids up to speed. There are so many changes and priorities in piloting the new Math, English, and Science curriculum that the need for multilingual students and staff will be at the bottom of the list. It is very frustrating."*

Mrs. Sath responded, *"Normally, we have students taking the ACCESS test in January or early February, but during the remote learning phase in 2021, students took the test more into the middle of April. So the testing was delayed, and the results were also delayed. We did not get the scores until November, but they were tentative scores, so we didn't get the official scores until January 2022. Even though they took the test, we didn't have any information, and we had to go off their scores from the previous year."*

Mrs. Bart responded that the lack of information provided to the English Language Arts department about the ACCESS test and scores is a major issue. Mrs. Bart said, *"There are times when I'm uncertain about how my class is helping ESL/ELL students do any good in the ACCESS test if I don't know what skills are tested and how. It is imperative for English Language Arts and ESL/ELL teachers to work in conjunction to address the needs of L2 students better."* Mrs. Bart added that for teachers to be proactive in student learning, school administrators must involve teachers in all parts of the assessment decision-making process.

Mrs. Rozell responded that technology issues were a major problem. *"The immediate feedback that we're used to was very difficult. There were kids on mute, or when they would speak, there were so many glitches, it made it hard for everyone to understand each other."* She also mentioned that she met with students less frequently. *"I had students who didn't have anyone to make sure that they logged in every day. So attendance was inconsistent. Obviously, that affects assessment, whether I was doing a formal or informal assessment."*

In question 4, I asked teachers: How has the pandemic helped assessment for second language learners?

Ms. Ferran, Mrs. Petrosa, and Mrs. Bart shared the same opinion about how the pandemic helped assess students. They said that technology allowed them to assess students differently. Ms. Ferran said, "*I feel that COVID pushed me to try out new things to help my students complete their assignments. Students created infographics and slideshows to tell me about themselves and their culture. Learning about them helps build a positive relationship with the student; otherwise, the student will shut down easily or not even try talking.*" Mrs. Petrosa said, "*The variety of applications/games available online helped students review vocabulary.*" Mrs. Bart said, "*Students were able to be creative in showing what they were able to do with technology, such as creating narrated slideshow presentations.*"

Mrs. Toledo said that the pandemic led teachers to be more creative. "*I think they are open to more ways to use technology. They are now creating online student portfolios where the student, teacher, and parents have access to it and constantly see the child's progress. This helps parents understand where their child is throughout the school year and not just for parent conferences.*" Mrs. Toledo also mentioned that the ACCESS test was optional and not required for students to take during the pandemic. "*That year, we had many students who graduated out of the ACCESS test, more than the previous year before the pandemic, which was weird, especially as teachers saw them struggle in the classroom.*" Mrs. Toledo added that the school district's exit goal for students in the Multilingual Program is for 10% of the students to exit yearly. In the 2019-2020 school year, out of the 143 students who took the test, only 8% of the students exited the program, and in the 2021-2022 school, out of the 177 students who took the test, only 7% of the students exited the program. Nevertheless, the ACCESS test was optional in the 2020-2021 school year, yet 11% of the students exited the program, surpassing the district's goal. Mrs. Toledo said, "*The ACCESS test for the 2020-*

*2021 school year was much easier. The writing prompts were not as rigorous and less demanding. Students were able to answer the prompt's question to the best of their ability without including as many components in their answers. Also, the reading passages were shorter, included less number of questions, and were at students' grade level or lower."*

Mrs. Page said that using technology tools like recording applications helped the students self-assess themselves and practice giving and receiving student feedback. *"One thing that the pandemic helped with was that students were becoming more comfortable speaking and recording themselves. I would ask them to listen to their recorded answers and self-assess themselves with the rubric. Then, I would repeat the process with the student individually or in small groups. As students listen to their audio, they would make notes on the rubric to explain why they rated themselves with such a rating."*

Mrs. Sath said, *"Students have become more familiar with the use of their devices. We spend less time reviewing the keyboard functions and navigating through the software we use. Thanks to the school's software, I was able to use technology to have my students show what they knew. For example, our software lets students type a sentence, and they have the option to draw a picture or add a picture related to what the sentence is about. I used these types of exercises to spark student conversations."*

Mrs. Rozell said, *"Scholastic news, I felt, saved our lives. It's so good for ELLs because they always have a short video. It's very visual. All of it was digital already, so we were able to show short videos on pretty much all the content that we needed. They even have vocabulary slides that go with each article. You can use highlighting tools and a read-aloud voice that reads the article to you."*

The teacher responses from the second session of interviews confirmed the necessity of using standards-based assessments and practical, real-life assignments in the context of second language teaching and learning. The responses can be summarized in the following

three themes: 1)The use of real-life application tests and activities is vital for learning a second language, 2) The use of rubrics is beneficial for providing specific and prompt feedback that informs the student about their strengths and areas for improvement, and 3) the COVID-19 pandemic allowed teachers to try out new digital tools to present the material and assess student knowledge.

**Parent Interview**

I invited all the parents who were present during the third Bilingual Parent Advisory Meeting to participate in my study. Out of the nine parents who asked for a consent form, only 3 agreed to participate to complete the interview. The interview consisted of 5 questions (Appendix D). I audio-recorded all interviews and transcribed them using Otter.com.

In Question 1, I asked: How much do you know about the type of assessment practices that monitor your student's academic progress? What are some of the assessment practices that you know about?

All three parents shared that they had limited to no knowledge of the types of state-mandated assessments, such as the ACCESS test. Mrs. Matos said, *"I know that there is a test that my students take to prove that they know English, but I don't have much information on what the process looks like."* Mrs. Sanchez said, *"I don't know what type of testing my children were subject to when I accepted the bilingual support. I just wanted to make sure they received bilingual services."* Mrs. Pereira said, *"I received a letter from the school stating that my son had exited out of the bilingual services, but I didn't know how they determined that, so I met with the teacher who explained to me the process of passing the ACCESS test."*

In Question 2, I asked: What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of how your child's progress is monitored?

Mrs. Matos responded, *"I would prefer for my children to complete other types of tests and assignments that are relatable to what they are learning in class that week."* Mrs. Sanchez responded, *"I think tests can be used for determining if the child needs additional services and supports, but I worried about how the amount of testing can increase student anxiety and confusion."* Mrs. Pereira responded that the tests should be offered in the student's native language, especially if the student has no knowledge of English. *"If the test cannot be provided in their language, the instructions, at least, should be provided in their language so that they understand what they need to do."*

In Question 3, I asked: What are your concerns regarding the type of testing used to monitor their child's progress?

All three parents mentioned that the amount of testing neglects students' social-emotional well-being. Mrs. Sanchez said, *"I worry that so much testing can negatively affect the students' confidence and instead limit their potential and performance. I'm now thinking if my decision to accept bilingual support for my child is really beneficial? Worth it?"* Mrs. Matos said, *"During the days of continued testing, my children tend to become very stressed, disengaged, and overwhelmed."* Mrs. Pereira said, *"Testing doesn't consider students' different temperaments or needs. For some students, it may be difficult to sit for long periods of time, affecting their attention span and amount of effort they put into it."*

In Question 4, I asked: What type of assessments would you prefer to monitor your child's progress?

All three parents who participated in the study responded that their children show more enthusiasm when doing projects, storytelling, and journaling. Mrs. Matos stated, *"My kids prefer to do hands-on activities. I see that they put more effort when asked to research a topic or create a presentation or a poster project."* Mrs. Sanchez responded, *"Teachers do a great job letting students share about their families. My daughters love listening to their*

*peer's stories and sharing with others about their culture."* Mrs. Pereira responded, *"My son's teacher is so welcoming of him knowing another language and asks him to teach her and the class with basic greetings. Her taking the time to do it in her class shows me she is genuinely interested in learning about our culture and our language."*

In Question 5, I asked: Do you have any recommendations you would like to make to the district about monitoring your child's progress?

All three parents in the study express the need to improve communication, incorporating more parent or family-oriented workshops and more bilingual and cultural representation in resources such as books, cultural practices, and languages. Mrs. Matos said, *"The district could distribute pamphlets or brochures that explain the assessment practices to parents in more detail. Also, having an interpreter available could help ease the stress for some parents who don't speak English."* Mrs. Sanchez said, *"monthly meetings, in-person or virtual, where teachers focus on curriculum topics with parents so that we are aware of what our children are learning can help us understand what we can do at home to help them review or practice."* Mrs. Pereira said, *"it is important for my children to see books that reflect their culture and portray themselves in a positive way so they can be proud of being bilingual."*

Based on the parent's responses during the interviews, I concluded the following: 1) There is a lack of awareness, on the parent side, on what state testing procedures look like for the student, 2) State-mandated testing negatively affects student's social-emotional wellbeing, and 3) there is an urgency for more cultural representation within the curriculum and resources available to the multilingual student and family.

**Interpretation**

After analyzing the data collected from the survey, faculty, and parent interviews, I have broken the commonalities into five themes: 1) Implications of ACCESS testing, 2) Effective Instructional Strategies for Multilingual Learners, 3) Effective Assessment Strategies for Multilingual Learners, 4) Community Engagement, and 5) Professional Training.

*Implications of ACCESS Testing*

The survey results showed a mix of opinions regarding standardized testing as a reliable method that informs instruction. Perhaps this can be explained with the following quote, "Standardized tests are one of the most publicized forms of information available about public schools in the United States" (James et al., 2008, pp. 98-99). Although not to be used in exclusion, standardized tests become powerful methods when presented in combination with other achievement data." The teacher's responses to the open-ended question in the survey best support this statement. Teachers responded that having a data point from standardized tests is a good starting point but should not be the only data entry for student placement. All teachers reported that the ACCESS test does not release student scores promptly, and when data is available, it is far too late for teachers to intervene and further support the student. Additionally, the teachers reported that the ACCESS test does not capture students' growth and progress in achieving English proficiency, nor does the test provide feedback to students on their areas of strength and areas for improvement. Thus, for students, who do not get to meet the expected benchmarks, a score becomes a synonym for deficiency. Lastly, teachers and parents mentioned the burden of the ACCESS test on the students' social-emotional well-being. For all these reasons, teachers shared that they integrate various instructional and assessment practices to ensure that multilingual learners have plenty of opportunities to show mastery and growth in the language.

*Effective Instructional Strategies for Multilingual Learners*

The use of instructional strategies utilized by the faculty who completed the study, strongly align with seven out of the eight effective teaching strategies for multilingual learners (ML) presented in "Building Literacy with English Language Learners: Insights from Linguistics" (Lems et al., 2017). Below is the breakdown of strategies by name and their effectiveness, paired with examples of instructional activities that the teachers from the study utilize in their classrooms.

Figure 16: Effective Teaching Strategies for Multilingual Learners

| Strategies | Effectiveness | Teacher Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Strategy 1: Collaborative Learning Communities | ML thrive in cooperative learning and small group settings because they receive more opportunities to practice and use the language for authentic communicative purposes. | Partner Listening Activities Direct Instruction in Small Groups |
| Strategy 2: Multiple Representations of Content | ML benefits when they have several mediums of entry to the content, including visual images, audio, videos, and music. | Storytelling Narrated Presentations Visuals/Pictures Word Maps Open-Ended Questions |
| Strategy 3: Building on Prior Knowledge | Activating ML's prior knowledge before engaging in any academic activity ignites curiosity for learning the topic. | Visuals/Pictures Word Maps Open-Ended Questions |
| Strategy 4: Protracted Instructional Conversation | Conversations with peers and teacher fosters ML's academic growth. | Visuals/Pictures Word Maps Open-Ended Questions |
| Strategy 5: Culturally Responsive Instruction | ML need to see themselves and their home language reflected in the curriculum. | Using resources that depict different cultures - books, videos, articles. |
| Strategy 6: Technology Enriched Instruction | Programs, websites, and apps allow students to work independently and differentiate lessons in mixed-level classrooms. | Websites for reading comprehension and vocabulary practice Apps for Audio Recordings Digital Student Portfolios |

| Strategy 7: Challenging Curriculum | ML reflect a wide range of talents, abilities, and interests and should be held to the highest standards. | |
|---|---|---|
| Strategy 8: Strong and Explicit Vocabulary Development | ML need to learn the language of the content areas and experience new words and concepts as they are modeled, heard, spoken, read, and written. | Visuals/Pictures Word Maps Open-Ended Questions Narrated Presentations |

Per the data collected, the teachers in the study shared that being culturally responsive is essential for creating a safe learning space for all students. However, the participants mentioned that this is an area of much-needed improvement for the school district. Currently, there is limited availability of bilingual books in students' native languages and books that depict other cultures. This type of resource limitation devalues students' culture, linguistic, and self-identities. From my teaching experience, there is a lack of cultural representation at the school buildings. The parents who completed the study shared that they would love to see their children learn about their cultural practices and explore others regularly as a way of emphasizing that being bilingual and culturally diverse is an asset. Families suggested that adding after-school clubs or activities that focus on the needs of multilingual learners could help embrace students' linguistic abilities and make everyone more accepting of others who speak other languages.

Based on the data collected, there is an absence of strategies that teachers utilize to create a challenging curriculum. From the interviews, the teachers expressed the frustration of piloting new curriculums without allocating time to evaluate their effectiveness. They expressed that learning new software and implementing new curriculum changes is challenging and overwhelming alone. This was also an area of much-needed improvement identified by the faculty. As discussed in the As-Is arenas of change (see Figure 14.0), the lack of professional development opportunities for assessing multilingual learners, to an

extent, enables the absence of how teachers create challenging curriculums. During the interviews, teachers also expressed the implications of not having an administrator supporting the multilingual department. One of the teachers responded that such limitations created and continue to create inequities in the types of support offered to multilingual learners, as there is no district plan for teachers to use as a reference.

### *Effective Assessment Strategies for Multilingual Learners*

The assessment practices that the study's participants use for assessing language learning and growth strongly align with those of Chappuis (2015) in *"Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning."* Below is the breakdown of strategies by name and their effectiveness, paired with examples of assessments that the teachers from the study utilize in their classrooms.

Figure 17.0: Chappuis (2015) Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning

| Best Practice | Details | Identified Practice |
|---|---|---|
| *Strategy 1:* Provide a clear and understandable vision of the learning targets. | The teacher shares the learning targets, objectives, or goals with the students at the start of instruction or activity. | Introducing learning targets at the start of the class activity. <br><br> The use of rubrics aligned with the WIDA standards for assessing student performance and work. |
| *Strategy 2:* Use examples and models of strong and weak work | The teacher uses examples that demonstrate strengths and weaknesses related to problems students commonly experience, especially the most concerning to the teacher. Teachers ask students to analyze the samples for quality and to justify their judgments. | Displaying student work and creating rubrics using student feedback. |
| *Strategy 3:* Offer regular descriptive feedback | Teacher offers feedback with respect to the specific learning target. Allows the student with time to act on it before holding them accountable for mastery. | Formative Assessments |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Strategy 4:* Teach students to self-assess and set goals for the next steps | Teacher transfers the ownership of learning to the student. Teaching students to self-assess and set goals allows them to learn how to provide their own feedback. This strategy requires the application of strategies 1-3. | Rubrics Student Portfolios |
| *Strategy 5:* Use evidence of student learning needs to determine the next steps in teaching. | Teacher checks for understanding and continuing instruction guided by information about what students have and have not yet mastered. | Formative & Summative Assessments |
| *Strategy 6:* Design-focused instruction, followed by practice with feedback | After delivering instruction targeted to an area of need, the teacher offers practice opportunities for students to to revise their work before reassessing and grading. | Formative Assessments & Rubrics |
| *Strategy 7:* Provide students the opportunities to track, reflect on, and share their learning progress. | Teacher includes activities that require students to reflect on what they are learning and on their progress. Students have the opportunity to notice their own strengths and progress. | Student Portfolios |

*Note.* Chappuis, 2015

### *Community Engagement*

Based on the parent feedback from the interviews, building stronger relationships with the school is a significant concern. Parents said they would like the district to host more opportunities for parents to get involved but feel that language stands as a barrier. From my experience of attending the Bilingual Parent Advisory (BPA) meetings, families in attendance have corroborated the same sentiment. Families expressed that in the past, the (BPA) meetings were only held in English, which was a bit discouraging to attend as they could not understand and engage in the conversations. Therefore, parents have expressed gratitude to the district for holding the meetings in English and Spanish. According to the parents who completed the interviews, doing so makes them feel comfortable and welcome to express their concerns. The parents also suggested that the district continues providing meetings for parents in multiple languages, including any information sent out by mail or email. Per this feedback,

the multilingual team has continued to host all their meetings in both languages and distribute any digital or printed materials in English and Spanish. The school's home page now offers a feature where parents can translate school announcements into Spanish and Ukrainian.

## Judgments

Improving assessment practices that provide an accurate representation of multilingual learners' proficiency progress through focused and timely feedback to the student and utilizing the assessment data to inform further instruction was the focus of this study. The primary research questions addressed the effective instructional and assessment practices used by the teachers in Kamino School District. The research involved comparing survey and interview responses to identify common practices identified by the participants in this study. The primary questions were:

1. What are the most meaningful assessment tools for second language learners that provide meaningful formative feedback without being discriminatory?

2. To what extent, if any, can assessments better inform curriculum development for second language learners?

3. To what extent, if any, can assessment data inform instructional practices?

4. What type of assessments can teachers use to better inform instructional practices?

Per the survey, all participants agreed that standardized testing is unreliable for assessing second language learners' skills and knowledge. All participants disagreed about exclusively using standardized testing, such as the ACCESS test, to monitor language skills and learning. They also agreed that standardized testing like the ACCESS test and IAR are not appropriate reflectors of students' knowledge in a second language. On the other hand, all participants agreed that assessments and activities that require real-life application are effective learning tools for language learning and tracking language development.

The teacher responses from the second session of interviews confirmed the necessity of using standards-based assessments and practical, real-life assignments in the context of second language teaching and learning. Teachers also stated that an effective tool for providing student feedback and informing instruction is rubrics. The teachers said that the use of rubrics allows students to self-assess themselves, track their progress, and set learning goals per their performance. The use of formative assessments at the beginning, throughout, and at the end of daily activities also helps teachers understand where their students are at and if there are any gaps that need to be addressed.

Lastly, the addition of authentic resources that depict cultural and linguistic diversity was a common theme expressed by all teachers and parents who completed the interviews. Teachers shared the importance of presenting topics through authentic and purposeful activities. They suggested that the district must continue to expand the libraries across all school buildings with bilingual books in the student's native languages to promote literacy in multiple languages.

In addition to the five primary research questions, I asked four secondary questions as part of the study.

1. How is assessment monitored at Kamino School District (KSD)?

2. How is assessment at KSD used to further guide instruction and interventions?

3. How does the grading culture of KSD affect assessment performance?

The stories from the teacher interviews answered all four secondary questions. At Kamino School District, multilingual learners are assessed with the state-mandated standardized test Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners (ACCESS). In addition, they are also assessed with the Illinois Assessment of Readiness (IAR) and the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP). According to the teachers who completed the interviews, the ACCESS and IAR do not release their scores

until the following academic year. When schools and students receive the information, interventions are too late. Consequently, teachers face the challenge of having data that can no longer be used to improve learning and instruction, especially when students have passed to another grade level or moved out of the district. In addition, teachers expressed that the ACCESS and IAR data fail to reflect multilingual learners' mastery of language and skills accurately. Therefore, using standardized testing solely as the indicator for student placement is problematic and adds to the recurring issue of student placement in fully immersed English classes, regardless of language proficiency.

In most schools, the grading system reflects the student's academic aptitude and performance; however, it does not accurately capture multilingual learners' skills and growth when learning a second language. At Kamino School District, the grading scales are as follows:

Figure 18.0: Grading Scale for Grades 3-8

| A = 100-94 |
| --- |
| B = 93-86 |
| C = 85-76 |
| D = 75-70 |
| F = 69-0 |

Figure 19.0: Grading Scale for Grades 1-2

| M = Meets Grade Level |
| --- |
| T = Towards Grade Level |
| B = Below Grade Level |

Two teachers stated that the grading scale for multilingual learners in First and Second Grade is problematic because multilingual learners are more likely to earn Below Grade Level even if they start showing some mastery and growth. For this reason, teachers are using student portfolios that include student work that shows growth in the domains. This way, the

focus is not on deficiency but on student progress and improvement. For grades 3-8, the teachers stated that the grading scale poses disparities for all students, including multilingual learners. For instance, a student with a 74% is in the D range, while this would be considered average in other schools. Not only does the grading scale create a competitive grading culture, but it widens the disparities within the multilingual community.

## Recommendations

Multilingual learners need to be given lots of authentic and meaningful opportunities to be exposed to the different domains of the English language (Samway & McKeon, 2007). According to the language teaching field, listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four large domains involved in learning a new language (Lems et al., 2017). However, there is a fifth domain - Communicative Competence. Rothenberg and Fisher (2007) describe this fifth domain as "the ability to know when, where, and how to use language in a variety of contexts or situations" (pp. 38). Therefore, multilingual learners need daily experience using all five domains. Integrating lessons and assessments that require students to engage in real-life situations is essential. The social interaction component of fulfilling such activities is undeniably enriching to the students' language developmental process. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, second language learners learn best through social interactions (Kozulin et al., 2003). Therefore, the results obtained from this study strongly endorse the effectiveness of using authentic learning experiences to enhance second language development. Based on the five themes that I outlined above, I am providing the following set of recommendations:

1. Schools and educators must consider other forms of assessment, other than standardized testing, to suit their students' language development best. Standards-based assessments allow students and teachers to monitor learning progress, self-reflect, and make instructional changes promptly. Therefore, teachers must continue to

incorporate assessments where students can track their learning progress and allow the self-reflection process to improve skills instead of raising letter grades. In addition, school administrators can further support the needs of standards-based assessment practices by putting less emphasis on test scores and shifting the attention to student growth based on performance abilities.

2. Instructional activities must be carefully planned to ensure that students are partaking in authentic learning experiences in which they can use the language beyond the classroom space. The expansion of bilingual books throughout all school buildings is necessary for promoting literacy in the student's first language at all grade levels. Another recommendation, considering the limited number of resources for the L2 learning community, would be for the school to expand the library's bilingual selection of books. This way, L2 and bilingual communities can continue to develop their native language abilities while learning English.

3. A contributing factor to the use of state testing for accountability is the societal context in education in the United States. Here, it is essential for educators and school administrators at all levels to involve the community so that its citizens understand the importance of assessment practices using a standards-based approach. Perhaps, the schools can designate a parent group and a teacher group that meets monthly to share assessment practices that allow parents to understand how their children's learning is monitored.

4. Educators may have a different understanding of addressing the learning needs of L2 learners and how to assess their knowledge. A recommendation would be for the school to provide professional development conferences throughout the school year for all general education teachers to be aware of different strategies to assess L2 learning in their classrooms.

5. School districts should treat the needs of multilingual learners equally as important as all other students. School districts can support all their staff with professional development opportunities where educators can be exposed to effective instructional and assessment practices for multilingual students regardless of the content area.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I identified the As-Is arenas of change (Appendix E) related to the contexts, culture, conditions, and competencies for improving assessment practices for multilingual learners. In the next chapter, I will share what the 4C's in the context of what Kamino School District looked like at the start of this study and what I envision the 4C's of the To-Be arenas of change for improving assessment practices for multilingual students. I will conclude the chapter by discussing the policy recommendations and implications of change.

CHAPTER 5: To-Be for Improving Assessment Practices

**To-Be for Improving Assessment Practices for Multilingual Learners**

Currently, schools are key sites where some linguistic and cultural resources are reinforced, and others devalued (de Jong, 2011). "Schools do not have to declare a formal "English-only" or "dominant culture only" policy and openly denounce the students' native languages and cultures to reinforce the dominance, higher status, and desirability of monolingualism or speaking standard English. Simply by only using English and dominant cultural practices, a school already sends a powerful message to speakers of languages other than English about the value of their language and cultural experiences" (de Jong, 2011, pp. 120). Hence, I am presenting the To-Be four arenas of change (Appendix F), as part of envisioning success in relation to the context, culture, conditions, and competencies for improving assessment practices for multilingual learners.

Figure 20.0: 4 C's Framework (To Be)

| Context | <ul><li>All levels within the school are part of the decision-making.</li><li>Diversity in teacher ethnicity that represents students' ethnicities.</li><li>The district's focus is equally distributed among all academic subjects.</li><li>District provides continuous professional development for all staff in assessing and teaching multilingual learners.</li><li>Multilingual learners are equally assessed as their peers.</li></ul> |
|---|---|
| Culture | <ul><li>The faculty works on the development of teaching practices as a problem-solving and collaborative team.</li><li>Specific professional development provided to all departments.</li><li>There is a time set for the administration to follow up.</li><li>Schools set time for teachers to work with experts in assessment for diverse learners.</li><li>Incoming teachers continue to be paired with a mentor to assist with the transition to the school.</li><li>The replacement of ESL/ELL labels to Multilingual Learner</li></ul> |
| Conditions | <ul><li>Effective and specific language development training is provided on all professional development days.</li><li>There is an allocated time for multilingual staff to collaborate with other departments.</li><li>There are more teachers to assist the multilingual learner population.</li><li>There is a time built within the schedule where teachers work together to reflect on lesson planning and assessment development.</li><li>Guest speakers and experts in the teaching and learning of a second language are invited to work with all departments.</li></ul> |
| Competencies | <ul><li>All teachers are active participants in sharing teaching and learning practices with others.</li><li>All teachers learn and continue to explore different instructional methods to meet the needs of second language learners.</li><li>All teachers are motivated to try new practices and open-minded to new ideas.</li><li>Teachers with vast years of experience and incoming teachers are part of curriculum development.</li></ul> |

**Future Contexts**

There is an alarming scarcity of Latinx educators that districts and state-level officials need to prioritize to support the Latinx student population. An ideal future context would be to make schools and district offices more reflective of the ethnically diverse communities they serve. "Latinos and all students benefit from integrated and diverse schools, but too often, the heavy lifting of integration is left to the students and families with the least agency" (UnidosUS, 2021, pp. 1). School districts and the Department of Education can improve outcomes for students by supporting the recruitment and retention of Latino educators. For the 2021-2022 school year, Kamino School District initiated Diverse, Equity, and Inclusivity (DEI) training for all staff. One way this initiative can improve the school district, in terms of DEI practices, would be by hiring matching educators so that the Latinx student demographics are proportionately represented through faculty, which encourages Latinx students to learn by seeing themselves reflected in leadership roles within the institution.

The DEI initiative can also improve the school district by carefully examining the biased and discriminatory assessment practices for multilingual learners. Students labeled as multilingual learners are mandated to take the ACCESS test. However, the ACCESS test fails to meet DEI practices. For example, isolating multilingual learners during testing while their peers continue to engage in daily instruction is discriminatory. Such practice continues to embarrass the same historically marginalized groups of students by excluding them from their regular classrooms and learning environment. When students take the IAR or the MAP test, instruction is suspended until all students finish the test. However, during ACCESS testing, the multilingual learner misses the learning experiences and is expected to be up to par with the rest of the students. In addition, the test does not provide appropriate feedback to the teacher or to the student. Plus, the data is delayed making it inefficient for educators to use the student data to inform instruction, interventions, and assessments. If students continue to

battle the embarrassment syndrome dating back to the colonial era with the Native American students in the early American colleges, the disparities will continue to stay the same. Therefore, it is essential to examine and challenge the notion central to the educational process to create learning environments that foster high levels of achievement (Tatum, 2008).

As an ideal future context, there is not any form of state-mandated assessment, such as the ACCESS test that removes students from their learning environments. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the ACCESS test was suspended. During this time, teachers resorted to creating their own formative and summative assessments to track student progress and mastery. Through the use of performance-based daily activities and assessments, students were able to show their understanding and set goals for the areas of improvement without facing the embarrassment and discriminating practices that they were summoned to with the ACCESS test. Teachers are using performance-based activities and assessments that offer prompt and specific feedback to the learner and the teacher to inform future instruction. Therefore, it is imperative that schools start looking into different ways of assessing students without isolating and embarrassing them. According to Ewell and Cumming (2017), "assessment should under no circumstances be regarded as a closed enterprise, which ends with definitive answers. Instead, the process is never entirely finished; rather, assessment is an important part of a continuous improvement cycle" (pp. 32-33). In Figure 21.0, assessments operate in a cyclical form as they are designed based on the learning goals and learning outcomes. Then, the assessment data is used to inform future instruction or areas of revision, and the process starts all over again in the same fashion. Performance-based assessments (PBA) are a powerful alternative to the traditional standardized achievement test that follows the continuous improvement cycle (Abedi, 2010). PBAs engage the multilingual learner in assessment tasks where they can comprehensively demonstrate their knowledge in content-

based areas by supplying in-depth information on students' academic needs and creating a learning environment that is cognitively stimulating for the students (2010).

Figure 21.0: Continuous Improvement Cycle
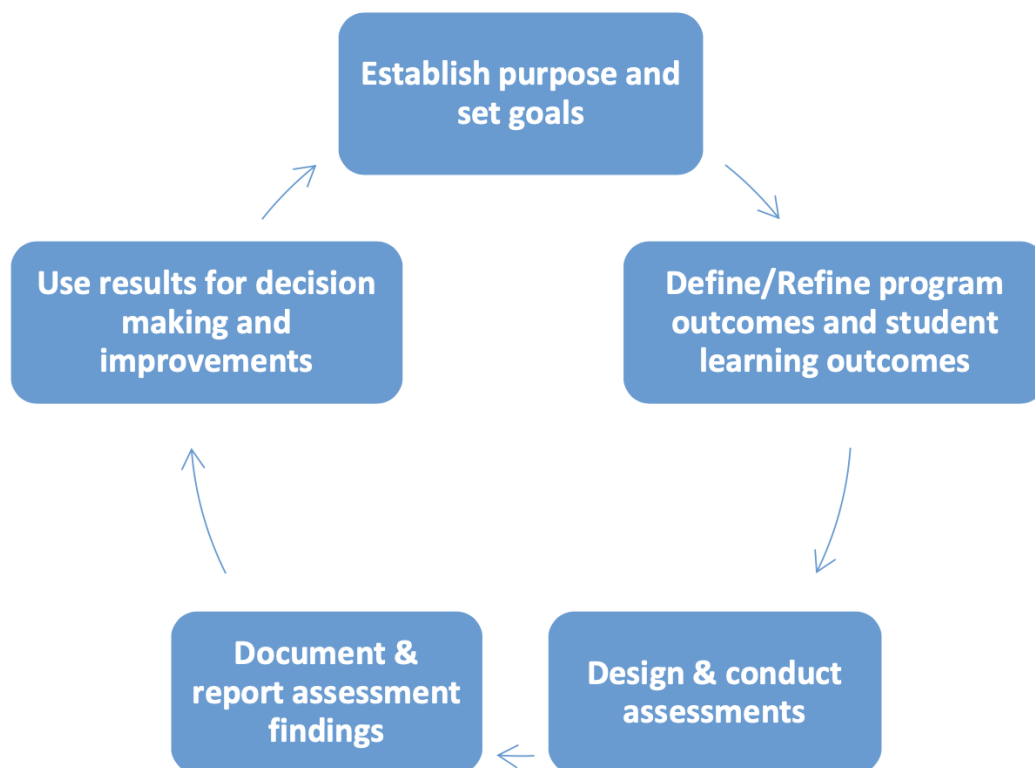


*Note.* Ewell and Cumming, 2017

**Future Culture**

In an ideal future culture, there is a culture of learning and professional behavior where all faculty work collaboratively on the development of teaching and assessment practices for multilingual learners as a collective. Schools that are organized as professional learning communities rather than bureaucracies are more likely to exhibit student academic success (Goldring et al., 2009). Such professional communities put student learning at the center, in which teachers share goals and values, focus on student learning, share work, and engage in reflective dialogues (2009). In this future culture, professional development opportunities focused on multilingual learners' needs are required for all teachers to attend,

with clear learning goals that can be implemented and evaluated for effectiveness. Achieving

such a future culture requires systematic performance accountability where all levels of

leadership are equally accountable for achieving student academic and social learning goals.

Goldring et al. (2009) present a school leadership assessment instrument that focuses on two

key dimensions of leadership behaviors - 1) core components; and 2) key processes. The six

core components refer to *what* needs to be improved, whereas key processes refer to *how* such

components will be achieved. The six core competencies are: 1) High Standards for Student

Learning, 2) Rigorous Curriculum (content), 3) Quality Instruction (pedagogy), 4) Culture of

Learning and Professional Behavior, 5) Connections to External Communities, and 6)

Systematic Performance Accountability. The six key processes are: 1) Planning - articulating

shared direction, policies, practices, and procedures among all faculty; 2) Implementing -

putting into practice the activities necessary for meeting the expected goals; 3) Supporting -

using financial, political, technological, and human resources that promote the achievement of

expected goals, 4) Advocating - promoting the diverse need of students within and beyond the

school, 5) Communicating - maintaining a system of exchange among internal and external

school member, 6) Monitoring - collecting and analyzing data to make judgments for

continuous improvement (pp. 13-18). Following the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership

(Figure 22) will ensure that all school members are being accountable for 1) providing and

attending professional development and implementing the strategies into the classroom, 2)

receiving various levels of support from both internal and external school leaders, and 3)

evaluating leadership behaviors that result in student performance and success.

Figure 22.0: *Vanderbilt Assessment for Leadership in Education*
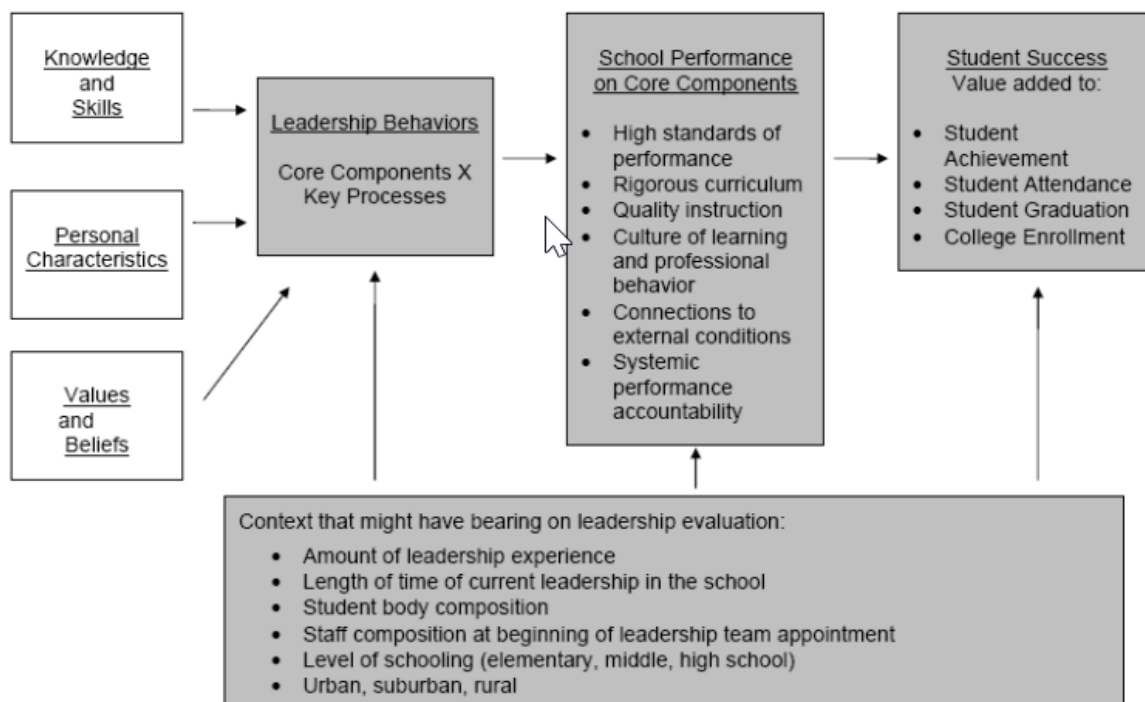


*Note:* (Goldring et al, 2009)

An ideal future culture embraces multilingual learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds that help construct their self-identity. One way to achieve this future culture is to remove student labels that imply a deficiency, such as Limited English Proficient (LEP), English Learner (EL), English Language Learner (ELL), English as a Second Language (ESL), and Emergent Bilingual (EB). The use of these terms is problematic because they place a deficit value and misrepresent the diversity in the student population (Eames, 2022). The use of such labels can lead multilingual learners to believe that they lack agency and do not have the linguistic capabilities to construct their identity (2022). At Kamino School District, the ESL and ELL labels have been replaced with the use of the term multilingual learners (ML). Unlike the previous labels, ML does not transmit a deficit, on the contrary, it reflects the students' linguistic attributes of learning more than one language simultaneously.

**Future Conditions**

From personal experience and based on the study's findings, the lack of professional development and collaboration time is a major concern at Kamino School District. In an ideal future condition, the district provides continuous and consistent professional development for all staff in assessing and teaching multilingual learners. To continue providing high-quality instruction for all learners, teachers must participate in ongoing professional development (Goldring et al, 2009). In return, all teachers are knowledgeable in teaching and assessment practices for multilingual learners. Teachers will incorporate the following eight effective teaching practices: 1) collaborative learning communities, 2) offering multiple representations of content, 3) building prior knowledge, 4) protracted instructional conversation, 5) culturally responsive teaching, 6) technology-enriched instruction, 7) challenging curriculum, and 8) strong and explicit vocabulary development (Lems et al., 2017). Applying these teaching practices will positively impact student motivation, student learning, and the classroom's culture of learning. In addition, the use of these instructional strategies will maximize the use of formative and summative assessments to improve student achievement. Furthermore, teachers will apply assessment practices that consider the following seven effective strategies: 1) providing clear learning objectives, 2) using examples of strong and weak work, 3) offering regular and descriptive feedback, 4) teaching students to self-assess and set goals, 5) use evidence of student learning to inform instruction, 6) design focused instruction followed by practice and feedback, and 7) provide students with opportunities to reflect, track, and share their progress (Chappuis, 2015). The application of these assessment strategies is supported by research based on the second language learning theories of Krashen, Swain, and Vygotsky. Both Krashen's and Swain's hypotheses include the assumption that students' second language proficiency increases when they engage in authentic opportunities to connect with others in the target language (Lems et al., 2017). Vygotsky's second-language learning

theories also support Krashen's and Swains' work. According to Vygotsky, second language learning is socially constructed. Thus schools are ideal settings for students to develop second language proficiency through social interaction. Furthermore, Vygotsky's concept - Zone of Proximal Development, acknowledges the complex process of language learning and the importance of differentiating instruction among the students in the classroom (Lems et al., 2017). Therefore, the use of the identified assessment strategies is essential for providing multiple learning opportunities based on the student's level and skills in the language.

Furthermore, an ideal future condition would be hiring additional certified educators to work with multilingual learners. This way, the overload of students per teacher reduces and creates more opportunities for the teacher to address the student's specific needs. Moreover, with additional staff members, teachers can collaborate with others to reflect and evaluate the areas of instruction, curriculum, and assessment. In an ideal future competency, teacher schedules will include a common planning period among teachers within the same department. Common planning time, when combined with purposeful and specific goals, fosters and promotes a variety of professional interactions and practices among educators (Lynch, 2021).

**Future Competencies**

Compliance, isolation, and reaction are three obstacles that interfere with progress and change (Wagner et al, 2006). Constantly adapting to new programs can withdraw people's interest. Per the study's findings, the implementation of a new curriculum without evaluating its effectiveness takes away from instructional time and is heavily overwhelming to the teacher. In an ideal future competency, the district and school administrators foster a culture of learning where all teachers are confident in exploring new strategies and applying them to their classrooms. All teachers' input is considered before adding or eliminating existing programs and curricula. In order to succeed with such changes, an ambitiously committed

community of leaders is required. According to Heifetz, when people are faced with learning new ways and adapting to the challenges as they arise without the tools or interventions to solve the problem is a sign of adaptive leadership - essential for inducing change (2009). During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers demonstrated adaptive leadership by incorporating new techniques and resources for students to access the content and demonstrating mastery through multiple mediums. To successfully achieve this future competency, it is imperative that school administrators cultivate a socially just shared governance predicated on full and equal participation of all teachers in a policymaking process that is democratic and participatory, inclusive, and affirming of human agency and human capacities for working collaboratively to create change ( Kezar & Posselt, 2020, pp. 27-28). Shared governance is a continual process of revising goals, assumptions, and values in order to make progress, which is necessary when making data-informed decisions (2020).

## Policy Statement

My vision of the To-Be areas of change (Appendix F) for improving second language learning for multilingual learners entails the following policy changes: the implementation of professional development for all teachers in performance-based instruction and assessment strategies for multilingual learners.

The application of Wagner's three phases in the ecology of change plays a central role in the successful implementation of policy changes (Wagner, 2006). In the first phase - preparing - leaders develop a shared and informed understanding of the need and urgency of the problem, the ways in which all educators in the district will contribute, and how the educators will work with each other. In the second phase - envisioning - the urgency for change expands to the school district and community, where they understand their roles and participation. The last phase - enacting- improving instruction is the primary priority. Here, all educators provide and receive information about the areas of strength and areas for

improvement. Data, accountability, and relationships are three change levers critical in the implementation of all three phases mentioned. The use of data can cultivate the urgency of the changes and be used to monitor and evaluate progress. Shared accountability enables collective ownership of and responsibility for the problem. Finally, by building trusting relationships with colleagues and the community, there is a common understanding of the required changes and work.

In combination with the three change levers, the school must include the following three generators to release momentum for change (Wagner, 2006). First, purpose and focus - there is a clear purpose to the "why" for the changes and the "how" to achieve the desired goals successfully. Second, engagement - everyone at all levels of leadership is actively involved. Thirdly, collaboration - working in groups that equally share accountability, failures, and successes. Following Wagner's ecology of change, everyone at all levels can practice a leadership role.

The implementation of district-wide professional development for all teachers in performance-based instruction and assessment strategies for multilingual learners requires an analysis of needs from the six distinct disciplinary areas to understand the problems involved. The six disciplinary areas of analysis include 1) educational; 2) economic; 3) social; 4) political; 5) legal; and 6) moral and ethical. The analysis of the six disciplinary areas provides the necessary considerations on how the policy change will impact all stakeholders in the successful incorporation and completion of professional development.

**Educational Analysis**

There is a significant absence of teacher preparedness and teacher collaboration among cross-curricular disciplines to address the needs of the multilingual learner better, as represented in the data in Appendix E. Professional development opportunities for all teachers in learning best teaching and assessment practices identified in this study has the potential to

improve student engagement, student achievement, and professional learning culture across the district. Based on the current assessment practices for multilingual learners, state-mandated tests are proving to not be effective in monitoring and reflecting student performance, skills, and growth in the second language. For example, each of the participants in this study discussed the use of the following instructional and assessment practices to better address the learning needs of the multilingual learner: 1) individualized instruction, 2) multiple modes of instruction, 3) multiple modes of communication; 4) differentiated instruction; 5) standards-based rubrics; and 6) student portfolios. Therefore, teachers at all grade levels and content areas implementing these six strategies will likely engage and incorporate equitable and non-discriminatory assessment practices.

Implementing effective instructional assessment practices for multilingual learners encourages educators to reflect and evaluate how their policies and practices represent and value culture and linguistic diversity. This principle of educational equity can be applied at the district, school, and classroom levels (deJong, 2011). Equally important, this principle can be applied to the areas of educational decision-making, such as curriculum and assessment. For instance, at the district and school level, educators can evaluate whether and how their school-wide initiatives, like the mission statement, school plans, textbook adoption, and parent involvement activities include and represent different languages, cultures, and experiences (2011, pp. 175-176). Additionally, administrators can examine whether and how their programs value cross-cultural differences and promote the development of positive social relationships among students from different racial, cultural, and social status backgrounds. At the classroom level, teachers could examine whether and how their students have opportunities to represent and explore multiple identities and how their practices include students' lived experiences in meaningful ways (2011). Hence, teachers who implement this

practice are likely to engage and incorporate equitable and non-discriminatory assessment practices.

**Economic Analysis**

An economic impact of implementing a professional development series in effective instructional and assessment practices for multilingual learners requires analyzing the financial challenges. Implementing a district-wide policy requires extensive planning, resources, and money. Student and staff body composition, level of schooling, and geographic setting of the school can all have a bearing on the challenges to providing high-quality education leadership (Goldring, 2009). The following is a list of economic implications of implementing the complete participation of teachers in the professional development series on best instructional and assessment strategies for multilingual learners:

1) Teachers or subject matter professionals leading the professional development series will require financial stipends.

2) School leaders will budget for the funds necessary to cover the district-wide professional development series.

3) School administrators will have to plan for the number of substitutes required during the professional development series.

4) Teachers will feel better prepared to support the multilingual student population, reducing teacher burnout.

Although there are several areas that will require extensive planning, the implementation of professional development will result in teachers being better prepared to support the multilingual student population, reducing teacher burnout. Secondly, a strong student performance district requires a supportive parent community; hence, implementing professional development on instructional and assessment practices will increase student engagement and performance, making the school district more welcoming to multilingual and

culturally diverse families. Thirdly, student achievement in the long term can lead to financial gains for the school district. With more funding, schools can provide better schooling resources, including smaller classroom sizes, technology equipment, access to school programs, curriculum development, and competitive teacher compensation - all essential aspects of providing high-quality education.

**Social Analysis**

Collaboration is at the heart of implementing a professional development policy from a social perspective. With the No Child Left Behind legislation, the push for a rigorous curriculum became the core of the standards and accountability movement (Goldring, 2009). However, rigorous curricula and traditional standardized tests, often developed for the mainstream student population, neglect the needs of multilingual learners (Abedi, 2010). Consequently, exit exams are considered a major gateway to upward mobility driving teachers and students to be exam-centered and grade-conscious, taking away from the importance of building collaborative communities (Lam, 2020). Collaborative communities create safe and productive spaces for teachers to share, reflect, and work together with a clear purpose - essential for leading change. Building collaborative communities entails creating a scheduled time and place to bring school leaders from all levels together to express concerns and develop solutions with the students at the center of the decision-making (Wagner, 2006). In a collaborative community, teachers can reflect on their instructional and assessment practices with others and address areas of concern together. Teacher support and evaluation processes have to create allowances for innovation and not penalize teachers for periods of chaos that come with innovation (Hammond, 2015). Therefore, it is critical that school administrators create safe spaces for teachers to expand on effective teaching and learning practices within a collaborative learning community.

For teachers, creating the right conditions of care and challenge is important for cultivating a positive academic mindset within their classrooms. According to Hammond (2015), "What we believe about ourselves as learners and our ability to be effective are the catalysts for learning" (pp. 109). In Figure 23.0, the visual illustrates the four components that foster a positive academic mindset that promotes student engagement and achievement.

Figure 23.0: Components of Academic Mindset
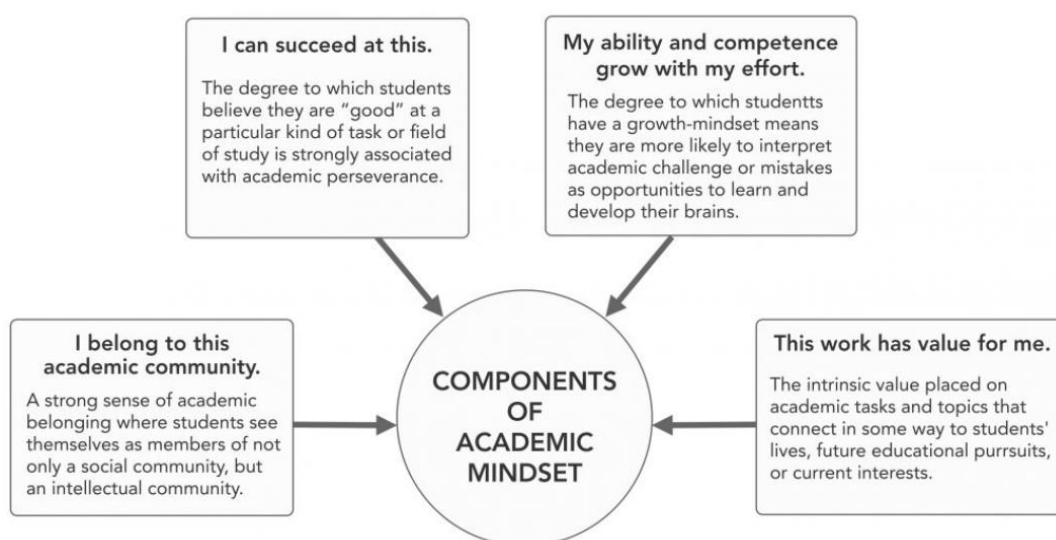


*Note.* (Hammond, 2015)

When building a positive learning community, teachers must advocate for their students and be an ally at the same time. Having a two-way alliance is essential for establishing trusting relationships with students and parents. In my experience as an educator, building a partnership with students and parents proves to have a positive impact on the community and student engagement. Implementing a professional development policy that focuses on best instructional and assessment strategies teachers will:

1) Share and reflect on their own teaching practices with others to ensure that all students are provided with authentic and equitable learning opportunities.

2) Build trust and rapport with students to cultivate a positive academic mindset in which students feel safe, valued, connected, and respected for who they are.

3) Share strategies and resources with parents. Parents will use this information and knowledge to best support their students at home, aligned with the six strategies identified in this study.

**Political Analysis**

A political impact of implementing professional development in effective instructional and assessment practices for multilingual students will include the participation of all teachers. Teachers will have to share the same vision in ensuring that multilingual students receive daily opportunities to practice the language using all six effective strategies as identified in the study. Effective instruction involves engaging student background knowledge and integrating factual knowledge with conceptual frameworks (deJong, 2011). In other words, students will be able to maximize their linguistic and cultural expertise for learning. Hence, with the implementation of professional training in effective instructional and assessment practices, teachers from all content areas will integrate classroom activities that draw from students' background knowledge when learning new content.

Another political impact is that the use of standardized testing is the most common practice for keeping schools accountable for achieving the expected student learning outcomes. Districts and schools generally move forward as best as they can to comply with the states' agendas, neglecting the need for professional development. Plus, the translations of legislative and gubernatorial initiatives into support for schools fall to the state agencies, which are struggling to realize a significant change in their roles shaped by the standards and accountability movement (Louis et al., 2010). Furthermore, states and districts within a state used widely different cut-off scores and assessment instruments, making it difficult to compare programs at the school, district, and state levels (Linquanti, 2001). Therefore,

implementing professional development in the best instructional and assessment strategies will allow the following for teachers, administrators, and district leaders:

1) Teachers can effectively support multilingualism by understanding how language development occurs at home and in school.

2) Administrators will be able to effectively provide teacher support through follow-ups, feedback, and evaluation of the implementation of the strategies.

3) District leaders will be able to identify and evaluate school policies and practices that are subtractive to the learning environment.

**Legal Analysis**

Regarding legal implications, implementing a district-wide professional development series in effective instructional and assessment practices for multilingual students is scheduling the days. A school district that consists of various school buildings for different grade levels may pose restrictions in scheduling the time and place for teachers to attend the sessions. Also, district leaders will have to plan for compensation for any professional development participation required outside of contractual hours. Plus, district leaders will have to create and enforce a policy requiring all K-8 teachers to attend and participate in the professional development series. The policy must include clear expectations and responsibilities for teachers throughout the course of the professional development series. Finally, district leaders will have to create a set of ramifications for teachers who do not fully or partially complete the professional development series. Teacher evaluations can be used as a way to rank teachers as *proficient* or *excellent,* contingent upon the successful completion of the development series.

**Moral and Ethical Analysis**

The implementation of professional development in teaching and assessing multilingual learners supports all teachers and students. The policy supports teachers'

professional growth in performance-based activities and assessment techniques for all students, including multilingual students. The policy changes support students' academic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds and self-identity. The policy changes support community involvement and engagement. The policy changes ensure that all students in grades K-8 experience the same teaching and learning practices by all teachers. The moral and ethical responsibility for providing equitable and non-discriminatory assessment practices lies in the hands of all school members and educators.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented my vision of the To-Be arenas for improving assessment practices for multilingual learners. In my To-Be organizational analysis, school administrators foster a collaborative learning culture where all teachers are knowledgeable in instructional and assessment strategies to address the needs of the multilingual learner best. I concluded the chapter by discussing the implications of achieving the To-Be arenas through an analysis of needs from the six disciplinary areas - educational, political, social, legal, moral, and ethical. In the next chapter, I revisit the purpose of my evaluation and provide a broad summary of my evaluation.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

*"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."*

*-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

In my research and evaluation, I identified eight effective instructional practices and seven effective assessment practices that provide multilingual learners with authentic and real-life application learning experiences. I compared my findings to Chappuis' (2015) effective assessment practices for multilingual learners and to Lems' et al. (2017) on the best effective teaching strategies for multilingual learners. Through my research, I recommend a policy to implement a professional development series to teach district teachers of all content areas about effective teaching and assessment practices that positively impact multilingual students' achievement.

## Discussion

Today's educational system has turned to standardized testing to maintain schools to a high standard of accountability, mainly due to the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk* (Menken, 2010). Consequently, The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reform has pushed for more testing putting the second language learner community in a more vulnerable state. Thus, my research aimed to identify effective, meaningful, and equitable assessment practices that accurately represent second language learners' proficiency progress, feedback to the student, and utilizing the assessment data to inform instruction - all essential for lifelong learning and real-life application. The findings revealed the importance of using a combination of performance-based activities and assessments to effectively and accurately measure students' progress and skills in the second language. The eight effective strategies identified for teaching and learning were: 1) Collaborative Learning Communities; 2) Multiple Representations of Content; 3) Building on Prior Knowledge; 4) Protracted Instructional Conversation; 5)

Culturally Responsive Instruction; 6) Technology Enriched Instruction; 7) Challenging Curriculum; and 8) Strong and Explicit Vocabulary Development. The seven effective assessment practices identified for learning were: 1) Provide a clear and understandable vision of the learning targets; 2) Use examples and models of solid and weak work; 3) Offer regular descriptive feedback; 4) Teach students to self-assess and set goals for next steps; 5) Use evidence of student learning needs to determine next steps in teaching; 6) Design-focused instruction, followed by practice with feedback; and 7) Provide students the opportunities to track, reflect on, and share their learning progress.

Per the evaluation results, I recommend that all district teachers participate in a professional development series focused on effective instructional and assessment practices for multilingual learners, concentrating on the seven best teaching practices and eight best assessment practices for learning by Chappuis (2015) and Lems et al. (2017). The professional development series examines each practice to provide teachers with the knowledge and preparation to provide equitable, meaningful, and enriching learning opportunities for multilingual learners within their content area and grade level. I recommend the policy of requiring teachers to attend the professional development series to improve further the professional learning space where teachers share, reflect, and learn from one another's practices within and outside the classroom.

In my To-Be vision (Appendix F), I presented the ideal areas of leading change within the context, culture, conditions, and competencies for improving assessment practices for multilingual learners. In the To-Be organizational analysis, the policy change calls for school administrators to foster a collaborative learning culture where all teachers are knowledgeable in instructional and assessment strategies to address the multilingual learner's needs best. In addition, all teachers are knowledgeable in culturally responsive techniques that address the needs of all students, including the multilingual learner. In *"Culturally Responsive Teaching*

*and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students,*" Hammond discusses how understanding neuroscience is intrinsic to student learning (2015). By nature, the brain is wired to learn via collaborative grouping. Thus, integrating culturally responsive strategies and techniques concerning the three phases of information processing will better serve all students, including the multilingual learner population. Input - the first phase of information processing, the brain is most attentive when the content is relevant and provokes curiosity. In the second stage - elaboration - the brain moves the information from the short-term memory to the working memory. As a result, learning opportunities are memorable and meaningful. Application, the last stage, focuses on learning opportunities where students apply the new knowledge deliberately via real-life application (2015, pp.125).

## Leadership Lessons

Creating a survey and analyzing its data for the first time taught me several things. One of the changes I plan to do differently when designing surveys or questionnaires is adding demographic questions to understand my participants better. In my attempt to create a short survey, I ultimately left out essential questions that would have allowed me to know more about my participants before the interview phase. A second change is to be more purposeful with my survey statements and questions. For example, break down the questions to be more specific and measurable (James et al, 2008). Adding the open-ended question at the end helped me understand the participants' perspectives. Allowing my participants to provide additional insight on the survey questionnaire allowed me to understand their stories better and build a meaningful discussion during the interview phase.

On the other hand, conducting this research has allowed me to better understand the complexity of assessment practices currently in place at the site of study. Standardized test scores are never 100% reliable, as most published tests provide a "standard error of

measurement" that establishes what they consider the margin for error when implementing their test (James et al., 2008). For this reason, standardized tests like the ACCESS test should not be used for student placement, as the results of these tests alone will not demonstrate a holistic interpretation of student achievement or aptitude. The ACCESS test is a discriminatory and biased assessment practice that isolates and devalues the multilingual learner community. ACCESS test scores do not indicate what students know and can do. Yet, mandatory yearly testing is required until students earn the expected benchmark. As a foreign language educator and former second language learner, I feel compelled to learn and advocate for methods that look at student work and regularly require students to demonstrate what they know. This way, assessment data can be more than a score, but the compass that guides instruction at the moment and enhances the areas where students are struggling and challenging those who are meeting proficiency levels.

Research suggests that multilingual learners may take up to seven to nine years for multilingual learners to catch up with native English speakers (de Jong, 2011, pp.77). Therefore, mastering the discourse of each content area - math, science, social studies, and the language and literacy demands of language arts is a challenging and long-term process. The language journey of the multilingual learner is further challenging when proficiency is defined as being able to score at the same level as an average native English speaker on a standardized test. The ACCESS test, as identified in the study, crushes the academic mindset of the multilingual learner. The days and weeks of isolation during the intense ACCESS testing window destroy students' curiosity, depletes students' emotional well-being, and destroy students' academic mindset of believing *"I can succeed, I belong, I value."* The ACCESS test is a master lock to a student's academic mindset. The negative test experiences engrave a detrimental narrative to the student, nearly impossible to break down. The ACCESS test is the modern enterprise that continues to monopolize historically marginalized groups

like the multilingual learner, just like the slave traders who profited in economic, political, and social power from slave trading.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ACCESS test proved not to be a critical instrument for teachers and students. In reality, with or without the ACCESS test, teachers currently plan for activities that allow students to learn, engage and practice the content that reflects their students' interests and cultural backgrounds. Teachers also plan and modify assessments to best meet their students' needs. Therefore, I ask myself the following questions: What would schools lose if the ACCESS test was eliminated? What are the implications of eliminating the ACCESS test? What other alternatives can schools use to monitor a second language without an ACCESS test? If the ACCESS test measures English proficiency, what are the benefits of testing all students with the same test? Is the ACCESS test an equal assessment practice for students? Why use the ACCESS test if data is unavailable until a year later? Therefore, a major takeaway is building a supportive learning community. As an educator, it is paramount that students are provided with various learning experiences where they can monitor their learning progress and set goals for themselves. In return, students will believe in their potential and understand that a test score does not define what they know and can achieve.

### Recommendations for Further Study

One way to continue exploring this topic would be to perform an experimental study to determine to what extent, if any, is student performance on the ACCESS test reflective of students' English proficiency for multilingual learners and native English speakers. The study should consist of testing both groups of students with the ACCESS test and then comparing the data to determine any similarities or differences between either group. Completing such a study can provide more information on the validity and reliability of the ACCESS test in measuring language proficiency. Furthermore, conducting this study will provide additional

insight into the implications of standardized tests on the multilingual learner community, particularly in the Illinois Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leading Standards context.

## Conclusion

For the Latinx community, "education became a means for maintaining the relations of dominations that formed in the nineteenth century, and for delegitimizing and devaluing their cultural and linguistic identity. The schools, on the other hand, have not neglected or ignored Latinos. They have acknowledged them and taken concrete actions to ensure that Latinos remained a marginal population in the larger society" (San Miguel Jr. & Donato, 2009, pp. 43). Therefore, the values of inclusion, belonging, welcoming, and true integration are not simply aspirational ideals. In fact, they are essential dispositions for our world, where sharing and learning with people whose ideas, experiences, and cultures differ from our own are a reality. This year, 2023, marks the 55th anniversary of the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, yet it is bittersweet. There is nothing to celebrate. In fact, there is a lot of work left to do. The educational disparities among the multilingual learners that led to the enactment of this act are the same today. Standardized testing continues weaponizing students for not knowing English – the language of the "Americans." Racial hierarchy ideals and racist rhetoric with "Make America Great Again" continues to shame students for learning other languages and devaluing their culture. Subtractive curricula in schools continue to exclude the contributions of racial and ethnic minorities in United States history textbooks. Defining students with labels like ESL or ELL continues to imply a deficit of intellectual inferiority. If there is anything that the 55th anniversary of the 1968 Bilingual Education Act teaches us is precisely the accomplishment of educational imperialism at its finest - the marginalization, delegitimization, and devaluation of the cultural and linguistic identities of multilingual learners across the United States.

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Appendix A. Online Faculty Survey Questions

1) Standardized testing is a useful method that informs instructional practices.

Strongly Agree          Agree          Neutral          Disagree          Strongly disagree

2) Standardized testing is a reliable method for assessing second language learners' skills and knowledge.

Strongly Agree     Agree          Neutral          Disagree          Strongly disagree

3) Standardized tests are appropriate reflectors of students' knowledge in a second language.

Strongly Agree          Agree          Neutral          Disagree          Strongly disagree

4) Standardized assessment data offers reliable feedback to the teacher that helps to inform further instruction.

Strongly Agree          Agree          Neutral          Disagree          Strongly disagree

5) Standardized assessment data offers reliable feedback to the student on language learning and skills.

Strongly Agree          Agree          Neutral          Disagree          Strongly disagree

6) Standardized assessment data offers prompt feedback to the teacher that helps to inform further instruction.

Strongly Agree          Agree          Neutral          Disagree          Strongly disagree

7) Standardized assessment data offers prompt feedback to the student on language acquisition and skills.

Strongly Agree          Agree          Neutral          Disagree          Strongly disagree

8) Students learning a second language learn best through real-life application activities.

Strongly Agree          Agree          Neutral          Disagree          Strongly disagree

9) Students learning a second language learn best through real-life assessments.

Strongly Agree          Agree          Neutral          Disagree          Strongly disagree

10) If you selected "Neutral" for any of the questions above, please explain why.

11) Please share any other information pertinent to using test data to inform instructional practices

Appendix B. Faculty Interview Questions - Session 1

| |
|---|
| 1. What assessment tools does your school use to monitor second language learning? |
| 2. In your opinion, what advantages or challenges do these assessments pose? |
| 3. Based on assessment data, what type of interventions are offered to second language learners? |
| 4. What type of support is offered to second language learners? |
| 5. In what ways do you feel supported by your district in relation to offering support to second language learners? |
| 6. Describe any setbacks from your district in relation to the support offered to second language learners? |
| 7. Please provide any information that you would like to share. |

Appendix C. Faculty Interview Questions - Session 2

| |
|---|
| 1. What type of assessments do you use to assess students' second language learning? Why? |
| 2. How do you use the assessment data to inform your daily instruction? |
| 3. In what ways has the pandemic affected assessment for second language learners? |
| 4. In what ways has the pandemic helped assessment for second language learners? |

Appendix D. Parent's Interview Questions (English/Spanish)

| |
|---|
| 1. How much do you know about the type of assessment practices that monitor your student's academic progress? What are some of the assessment practices that you know about?<br><br>1. ¿Qué tanto es su conocimiento en relación a las prácticas de evaluación que utiliza el distrito escolar para asesorar el progreso académico del estudiante? ¿Cuáles son algunas de las prácticas de evaluación en las cuales está familiarizado? |
| 2. In your opinion, what are the advantages/disadvantages of how your child's progress is monitored?<br><br>2. En su opinión, ¿Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas de la manera en que su estudiante está actualmente evaluado académicamente? |
| 3. What are your concerns regarding the type of testing used to monitor your child's progress?<br><br>3. ¿Cuál es su preocupación sobre las evaluaciones utilizadas para asesorar el progreso académico de su estudiante? |
| 4. What type of assessments would you prefer to monitor your child's progress?<br><br>4. ¿Qué tipo de crítica constructiva, preferiría usted para asesorar el progreso académico del estudiante? |
| 5. Any recommendations you would like to make to your school about the way your child's progress is monitored?<br><br>5. ¿Qué le sugeriría o recomendaría al distrito escolar sobre las evaluación de progreso académico? |

Appendix E. 4 C's Framework (As Is)

| Context | <ul><li>The school district provides curriculum development, software, resources, and professional training.</li><li>Principals' beliefs and opinions influence the decisions and expectations teachers must carry out in each school building.</li><li>Large majority of students are middle class.</li><li>Majority of the students and faculty population is white.</li><li>District's focus on curriculum development for all content areas is unequal/disproportionate.</li><li>The school district supports some academic areas over others</li></ul> |
|---|---|
| Culture | <ul><li>The high level of autonomy given to teachers continues to drive staff to work independently, away from others.</li><li>Limited curriculum development opportunities for multilingual/foreign language teachers.</li><li>Foreign Language is grouped with Fine Arts. Teachers have complete control of the curriculum, and there is limited follow-up from the administration.</li><li>Limited focus on differentiating assessment for multilingual learners within cross-disciplines.</li><li>New teachers are assigned to a mentor (teacher at the school building) to help the incoming teachers with any questions.</li></ul> |
| Conditions | <ul><li>Limited time allocated for professional development in improving Multilingual/Foreign language learning and teaching.</li><li>Multilingual teachers are grouped away from other content areas.</li><li>Unequal number of multilingual educators in the buildings.</li><li>Limited opportunities to discuss diverse perspectives on improving teaching and learning for multilingual learners.</li></ul> |
| Competencies | <ul><li>Limited awareness of the assessment practices for multilingual learners and limited knowledge on addressing specific needs for multilingual students</li><li>Limited opportunities for multilingual staff to collaborate with other content areas</li><li>Faculty lacks the motivation to implement new things or be open to new concepts.</li><li>Some teachers are willing to help others and share strategies that work in their classrooms.</li><li>New curriculums for selected content areas (Math, English Language Arts, & Social Studies.)</li></ul> |

Appendix F. 4 C's Framework (To Be)

| Context | <ul><li>All levels within the school are part of the decision-making.</li><li>Other building principals' beliefs and decisions do not influence the expectations for all the schools.</li><li>Diversity in teacher ethnicity representation.</li><li>The district's focus is equally distributed among all academic subjects.</li><li>District provides continuous professional development for all staff in assessing and teaching multilingual learners</li><li>Multilingual learners are equally assessed as their peers</li></ul> |
|---------|---|
| Culture | <ul><li>The faculty develops teaching practices as a problem-solving and collaborative team.</li><li>Specific professional development provided to all departments.</li><li>There is a time set for administration follow-up.</li><li>School sets time for teachers to work with experts in assessment for diverse learners.</li><li>Incoming teachers continue to be paired with a mentor to assist with the transition to the school.</li><li>The replacement of ESL/ELL labels to Multilingual Learner</li></ul> |
| Conditions | <ul><li>Effective and specific language development training is provided on all professional development days.</li><li>There is an allocated time for multilingual staff to collaborate with other departments.</li><li>There are more teachers to assist the multilingual learner population.</li><li>There is a time built within the schedule where teachers work together to reflect on lesson planning and assessment development.</li><li>Guest speakers and experts in the teaching and learning of a second language are invited to work with all departments.</li></ul> |
| Competencies | <ul><li>All teachers actively share teaching and learning practices with others.</li><li>All teachers learn and continue to explore different instructional methods to meet the needs of second language learners.</li><li>All teachers are motivated to try new practices and open-minded to new ideas.</li><li>Teachers with vast years of experience and incoming teachers are part of curriculum development.</li></ul> |