Title: Research on testing accommodations for English Language Learners
(ELLs)

Date: March 2014

....

Question: >> What are the testing accommodations for English language
learner (ELL) students in the PARCC and Smarter Balanced tests?
How are they similar and different?

....

Response:

REL West staff searched selected websites for relevant resources (see "Methods" section below),
and compiled the following information. The memo is organized into the following sections:

1. Background
2. Testing accommodations for the PARCC test
3. Testing accommodations for the Smarter Balanced test
4. Similarities and differences

Citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher
of the article. Citations include a link to a free online version. We have not evaluated the rigor of
these resources, and provide this memo for your information only.

1. **Background**

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and The *Smarter
Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) are two multistate consortia awarded funding
from the U.S. Department of Education in 2010 to develop an assessment system aligned to the*
Common Core State Standards (CCSS) *by the 2014/15 school year. Both consortia have developed*
accommodations to make their assessment more accessible for English language learner (ELL)
students to produce results that are valid for these students.

2. **Testing accommodations for the PARCC test**

PARCC Assessment Consortia. (2013). *PARCC accessibility features and accommodations manual
2013–2014* (2nd ed.). Achieve, Inc. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved on January 22, 2014,
from
http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCC%20Accessibility%20Features%20a
nd%20Accommodations%20Manual%20November%202013.pdf

Excerpt (p. 37): Accommodations for English Learners. The universal design of PARCC assessments
is expected to increase access for most students through the availability of a range of accessibility

features for all students (see Section 2). However, some English learners may need additional accommodations during PARCC assessment administration. Additionally, English learners with disabilities are entitled to accommodations listed for students with disabilities in Section 3.

Accommodations should be considered for English learners by a group of educators familiar with the student, using the guidance provided in Section 5 – Decision-Making Process for Selecting, Using, and Evaluating Accommodations for Students with Disabilities, English Learners, and English Learners with Disabilities. In cases of English learners with disabilities, at least one person familiar with the language needs of the student should be a participating member of the IEP or 504 team, where accommodations decisions are made.

Educators familiar with the student should also consider which additional features will enhance accessibility for the student in order to determine their Personal Needs Profile (PNP). Section 2 describes the PNP and the additional accessibility features available to English learners on computer-delivered PARCC assessments.

Table 5 (p. 38) lists the accommodations on PARCC assessments that are available to English learners, cross-referenced with English Language Proficiency (ELP) level of the student and other administration considerations that may impact the effective use of the accommodation. See Section 5 for how ELP is determined.

Allowable Accommodations for English Learners on PARCC Assessments [see Table 5 on p. 38 for more information]:

- Extended time
- General Administration Directions Clarified in Student's Native Language (by test administrator)
- General Administration Directions Read Aloud and Repeated as Needed in Student's Native Language (by test administrator)
- Scribe or Speech-to-Text: Responses Dictated for Mathematics Assessment in English
- Word-to-Word Dictionary (English/ Native Language)

<u>Setting Considerations</u>. In accordance with principles of universal design for assessment, PARCC will provide administrative guidance around small group testing, specified area, and separate/alternate location. These will be considered as administrative setting considerations available to all students. Changes to the setting, including the location in which a student participates in an assessment, or the conditions within the assessment setting can benefit students who are easily distracted in large group settings and who concentrate best in a small group or individual setting. Every instructional and assessment setting should have good lighting and ventilation, with a comfortable room temperature, and should be as free as possible from noise and other interruptions. Chairs should be comfortable and tables at an appropriate height with sufficient room for materials. Staff should check that all needed materials and equipment are available and in good and working condition.
Important note: Some English learners or English learners with disabilities will require small group or individual testing due to other accommodations they use on PARCC assessments (e.g., scribe for the mathematics assessments, etc.).

<u>Unique Accommodations</u>. PARCC has developed a comprehensive list of accommodations and accessibility features that are designed to increase access for all students to PARCC assessments and that result in valid, comparable assessment scores. If a student requires additional accommodations that are not found on Table 5, PARCC states will each review requests for unique accommodations on an individualized basis and will provide approval after determining whether the accommodation would result in a valid score for the student, using comparable guidelines across all PARCC states. Please refer to Appendix F: Unique Accommodation Request Form.

3. Testing accommodations for the Smarter Balanced test

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Usability, accessibility, and accommodations guidelines.
(2013). Prepared with the assistance of the National Center on Educational Outcomes,
University of Minnesota. Retrieved on March 3, 2014, from
http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/SmarterBalanced_Guidelines_091113.pdf

Excerpt (p. 1): The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) strives to provide every student with a positive and productive assessment experience, generating results that are a fair and accurate estimate of each student's achievement. Further, Smarter Balanced is building on a framework of accessibility for all students, including English Language Learners (ELLs), students with disabilities, and ELLs with disabilities, but not limited to those groups. In the process of developing its next-generation assessments to measure students' knowledge and skills as they progress toward college and career readiness, Smarter Balanced recognized that the validity of assessment results depends on each and every student having appropriate universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations when needed based on the constructs being measured by the assessment. This document was developed for the Smarter Balanced member states to guide the selection and administration of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations … A member state may elect not to make available to its students, any universal tool, designated support, or accommodation that is otherwise included in the Guidelines when the implementation or use of the universal tool, designated support, or accommodation is in conflict with a member state's law, regulation, or policy.

(p. 9) Designated supports for the Smarter Balanced assessments are those features that are available for use by any student for whom the need has been indicated by an educator (or team of educators with parent/guardian and student). Scores achieved by students using designated supports will be included for federal accountability purposes. It is recommended that a consistent process be used to determine these supports for individual students. All educators making these decisions should be trained on the process and should be made aware of the range of designated supports available. Smarter Balanced states have identified digitally embedded and non-embedded designated supports for students for whom an adult or team has indicated a need for the support.

Selected items relevant to ELL students from *Table 3: Embedded Designated Supports* (p. 10)

- Translated test directions (for math items)
- Translations (glossaries) (for math items)
- Translations (stacked) (for math items)

Selected items relevant to ELL students from *Table 4: Non-embedded Designated Supports[1]* (p. 11)

- Bilingual dictionary (for ELA-performance task full writes)
- Translations (glossaries) (for math items)

---

[1] Some designated supports may need to be provided outside of the digital-delivery system. These supports are to be provided locally for those students unable to use the designated supports when provided digitally.

[REL West Note: the following publications may also be of interest]

Abedi, J., & Ewers, N. (2013). *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Accommodations for English language learners and students with disabilities: A research-based decision algorithm*. Davis, CA: University of California, Davis. Retrieved on March 3, 2014, from http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Accomodations-for-under-represented-students.pdf

Excerpt (p. 15): In this paper we discussed five major characteristics that an accommodation should have in order to be considered in the assessment of ELLs and students with disabilities (SWDs): (1) Effectiveness, it must be effective in making assessments more accessible to the recipients; (2) Validity, it should not alter the focal construct; (3) Differential impact, it must be sensitive to individual student's background; (4) Relevance, it must be relevant to the intended audience; and (5) Feasibility, it must be logistically feasible to administer.

While all five characteristics are essential for selecting appropriate accommodations for ELLs and SWDs, effectiveness and validity deserve a greater level of attention. This paper presents a summary of research for some of the most commonly used accommodations and based on the findings of the studies provides recommendations to help SBAC's member states in their decisions for selecting appropriate accommodations and accessibility features for ELLs and SWDs. The paper recommends the "Use" of an accommodation if there is substantial and consistent evidence on the validity of the accommodation and some indication of its effectiveness. Otherwise, the paper suggests the level of risks involved and the need for more studies to be done before the accommodation be implemented into the assessment system.

Young, J., Pitoniak, M., King, T., & Ayad, E. (2012). *Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: Guidelines for accessibility for English language learners*. Dover, NH: Measured Progress/ETS Collaborative. Retrieved on January 22, 2014, from http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/TaskItemSpecifications/Guidelines/AccessibilityandAccommodations/GuidelinesforAccessibilityforELL.pdf

Excerpt (p. 7): The primary purpose of these guidelines is to provide assessment developers and educational practitioners with a framework by which to make appropriate decisions in developing content assessments that are fair and valid for ELLs. Within these guidelines, we have provided guidance that is research-based to the greatest extent possible. Lastly, we want to emphasize that these guidelines are not intended to replace the professional expertise and judgment of experienced item writers and test developers, but rather is intended to add to the principles of good item construction that they already know and use.

4. Similarities and differences

While PARCC lists accommodations for ELL students, Smarter Balanced uses the term 'supports' for these students (accommodations, for Smarter Balanced, refer to students with disabilities).

Accommodation/Support	PARCC	Smarter Balanced
Extended time	X	
Translations for test directions	X (including read aloud)	X (for math items)
Translations (stacked) and translations (glossaries)		X (for math items)
Scribe or Speech-to-Text: Responses dictated for mathematics assessment in English	X	
Bilingual dictionary	X	X (for ELA performance task full writes)

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search
Test accommodations for English language learners AND PARCC OR Smarter Balanced

Websites Searched
Google, PARCC, Smarter Balance

WestEd — a national nonpartisan, nonprofit research, development, and service agency — works with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults.

REL West at WestEd • 730 Harrison Street • San Francisco, CA 94107 • 866.853.1831 • relwest@WestEd.org • http://relwest.wested.org