

Using Summative English Language Proficiency Assessments for California Task Types to Integrate Language Development and Science Content

Statewide Assessment Community: Highlighting Local Practices

Tulare County Office of Education

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District Profile

The Tulare County Office of Education (TCOE), located in the city of Visalia, serves more than 105,000 students in 43 districts, with an additional 25 district- and direct-funded charters, and 2 community colleges. Tulare students come from a wide range of ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds and speak more than 13 languages. The composition of the student population is 78 percent Hispanic/Latino, 15 percent white, 2 percent Asian, 1 percent Filipino, 1 percent African American, and 3 percent two or more races. Spanish is the primary language spoken by more than 75 percent of the students who are classified as Hispanic/Latino. Approximately 78 percent of the county's students qualify for free or reduced-price meals. About 24 percent of the students are classified as English learners, and 8 percent of the students have needs requiring special education services. Foster youths represent less than 1 percent of the students.

Mission Statement

The mission of the TCOE is to provide quality services and support to the students and school districts of Tulare County. This is achieved by promoting lifelong learning opportunities that will help individuals lead healthy and productive lives. The TCOE is dedicated to working in a collaborative manner with students, parents, school districts, public agencies, and communities to prepare students to meet the challenges of the 21st Century.

Goal: Making Science Instruction More Easily Accessible to English Learners (ELs), While Supporting English Language Development

In the 2019–2020 school year, teachers, curriculum leads, and site administrators in the TCOE were analyzing prior year Summative English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) scores to identify areas of growth as well as areas where additional support was needed. One outcome of these collaborative discussions was the realization that teachers may not be familiar with all of the task types associated with this assessment. The issue at hand was how, with limited time and resources, teachers can maximize their teaching to support the needs of all students. It was in the process of answering this question that teachers expressed a desire to have a stronger, more intentional approach to integrating English language arts (ELA)/English language development (ELD) standards with their other focus area of science. To do this, the TCOE Staff Development and Curriculum Specialist examined the Summative ELPAC task types in each of the four domains of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing at each grade level. It was quickly realized that the task types could easily be applied to the California Next Generation Science Standards (CA NGSS) to create a local baseline science assessment that supports language development in all students, including English learners. Once the purpose and goal of each task type were understood, Summative ELPAC practice test questions could be modified to address grade level specific science standards.

To maximize the impact of the connection between the Summative ELPAC and the CA NGSS, the Summative ELPAC practice test from each grade was used as the foundation for the process that followed. For each grade level, the questions in the kindergarten through grade eight Summative ELPAC practice tests were used as a basis for drafting resources aligned with CA NGSS.

The more educators can see the task types, the more successful the students will be.

—"Best Results for English Learners-Paving the Way"
Conference attendee

Approach: Spreading the Word

Considering the functionality of these new resources, the TCOE leadership was confident that the system would be well received by teachers and beneficial to students. Using the *Best Results for English Learners-Paving the Way: Supporting English Learners in a Changing World* conference as the initial platform, these newly created resources were shared with educators throughout California in November of 2020.

The next step was to provide training around effective use of these Summative ELPAC-based science resources. Over 30 school sites, spanning from as far north as Chico and as far south as Lake Forest, participated in a voluntary training opportunity and received access to these resources for use in their classrooms. The educators who attended these training sessions collectively shared their excitement about taking these resources back to their school sites, many planning to use them to integrate science content with English language acquisition.

One of these educators included Lesley Gates, Science Content Specialist with the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools. Lesley has been working with a rural school in Fresno County district on a three-year roll out of transitional kindergarten through grade six (TK–6) CA NGSS, with 2020–2021 being the last year of this effort. With the overwhelming challenges created by the novel coronavirus disease 2019, including the fact that many schools were physically closed, Lesley's focus was on ensuring that science was still being taught in the classrooms and that English learners were being supported in a variety of ways, even during distance learning. With support provided by Lesley, TK–6 teachers maintained uninterrupted access to the science curriculum. For the 2020–2021 CA NGSS professional learning provided by Lesley, ELD integration with science content was modeled through adopting districtwide use of Thinking Maps in conjunction to the supports already in place with the Summative ELPAC. The Thinking Maps were effective in showing how science content could be used to help students practice the different Summative ELPAC test types. All TK–6 teachers, including Special Day Class and Resource Specialist teachers, from four elementary school sites received mandatory grade-level training by February 2021. All trainings contained background information regarding the ELPAC task types, grade level CA NGSS information, as well as integration techniques for the resources provided. Additionally, all resources were consolidated into an online district-shared folder where documents could be easily accessed.

Using Thinking Maps to continue the conversation around the importance of science for all students, but specifically for English learners, creates an opportunity to obtain concrete evidence of the impact interdisciplinary teaching can have on language acquisition. As the implementation of Thinking Maps continues, qualitative and anecdotal evidence from educators using this tool will soon translate to quantitative data that can be used to further adapt these ELPAC-based science resources to the needs of the students and educators.



Seeing examples of ELPAC test type questions using my grade-level science standards gives me confidence to create my own questions.

—Grade four teacher, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

Challenges and Successes

Creating resources for educators to easily connect the Summative ELPAC task types with the CA NGSS created an opportunity for the TCOE to focus on the format and intent of the questions being asked, and well as on grade-level alignment of associated literary components.

Challenge: Alignment and Integration

Staying true to the format and intent of the Summative ELPAC practice test while aligning to grade-level CA NGSS was a priority during the creation of these resources. Not all task types lend themselves easily to a science focus. Alignment to grade-level CA NGSS was done only where appropriate so as to not deviate from the purpose of the Summative ELPAC task types. Another challenge was making sure teachers understood that using this resource did not replace direct instruction in the CA NGSS. Instead, the Summative ELPAC-based science resources should be integrated where appropriate during the science teaching sequence, especially during designated ELD time.

Success: Expanded Understanding of Cross-Curriculum Teaching

As educators became more aware of the types of questions that are asked of their students on the Summative ELPAC, more cross-curriculum development occurred, integrating additional opportunities to reinforce the tasks needed to demonstrate proficiency. Periodic educator surveys are conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how student learning is being influenced.

Next Steps: Dynamic Dashboard, School-Based Action Plans

The TCOE will continue to expand its efforts to develop cross-curriculum resources that support English language acquisition.

Additionally, the TCOE is building on its initial success by developing a system of educator surveys intended to collect quantitative data on the ELPAC-based science resources discussed here. The data will be used to determine next steps, ensure that the developed resources effectively support the needs of the educators and students, and more effectively identify and address student growth areas for both ELA/ELD and the CA NGSS.

Additionally, the TCOE will continue providing teacher support around these resources to ensure teachers understand the purpose and power of using grade-level science content aligned with the ELPAC test types. Providing teachers with instructional strategies on using these resources, and empowering them to build their own integrated resources, will allow teachers to more closely focus on the specific needs of their students in science and other content areas.

Resources

The following resources are being shared with permission of the TCOE and the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools. They may be used in their existing format or as templates for the development of resources for other content areas.

ELPAC Task Type Examples with Samples for K–8 (Google Drive folder)

<https://bit.ly/20gKpQt>

ELPAC-Based Science Resources (Google Drive folder)

<https://bit.ly/2OsBgnR>

Access a Sample Thinking Map (Google Drive document)

<https://bit.ly/3thCyAI>

Contact Information

Jared Marr

Staff Development and Curriculum Specialist—STEM

Tulare County Office of Education

Jared.Marr@tcoe.org

Lesley Gates

Science Content Specialist

Fresno County Superintendent of Schools

lgates@fcoe.org



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