California Department of Education

Executive Office

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# **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** December 11, 2020

**TO:** MEMBERS, State Board of Education

**FROM:** TONY THURMOND, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

**SUBJECT:** Update on the Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessments for California: Final Report for the Pilot Using Cognitive Lab Methodology.

## Summary of Key Issues

This information memorandum provides the Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (Alternate ELPAC) Pilot Using Cognitive Lab Study Report. The report includes recommendations on the task types, accessibility resources, and test administration materials for students who are English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

## Background

The California Department of Education (CDE) was planning to conduct the Alternate ELPAC operational field test from January 12, 2021 through February 16, 2021; however, due to the continued issues surrounding the spread of the 2019 novel corona virus (COVID-19), the CDE plans to delay the field test administration until the 2021–22 school year to ensure the safety of local educational staff and students. Test development activities will be adjusted to accommodate fall testing.

The Alternate ELPAC is for English learner students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are determined by their individualized education program (IEP) team to be eligible for an alternate assessment. When administered, the Alternate ELPAC operational field test will support the development of the Initial Alternate ELPAC and Summative Alternate ELPAC. The Initial Alternate ELPAC will provide information to determine a student’s initial classification as an English learner or as initial fluent English proficient, and the Summative Alternate ELPAC will provide information on students’ annual progress toward English language proficiency and support decisions for students to be reclassified as fluent English proficient. With the delay of the field test until the 2021–22 school year, the Initial Alternate ELPAC will now be operational July 1, 2022, and the Summative Alternate ELPAC will become operational February 1, 2023.

The CDE, in collaboration with Educational Testing Service and the Sacramento County Office of Education, conducted a pilot study January 14–30, 2020, using a cognitive lab methodology. The cognitive lab methodology was used to closely examine participants’ cognitive processes in completing specific assessment tasks. The overarching goal of the pilot test was to determine whether the proposed task types are suitable for the intended population. More information on the specific task types are provided in Appendix A of Attachment 1.

Three specific goals guided the study:

1. Examine test examiner and student interaction with proposed task types to determine whether the task types elicit the intended knowledge and skills, while minimizing construct-irrelevant interference.
2. Collect evidence of the use of accessibility resources for test administration and determine whether the test design supports access.
3. Examine test administration practices to determine whether the assessment is administered with fidelity to the *Directions for Administration* for standardized test administration.

There were 71 students who participated in this study. The majority had a primary language other than English, and all had significant cognitive disabilities. To compare the communication modes between English learners (EL) and English only (EO) students, the sample included 13 students who were not ELs. All participating students were administered a sample of the Alternate ELPAC items in a one-on-one administration—each with a test examiner who was familiar with the student. Test examiners recorded student responses in the student testing interface during the test administration. In addition, test examiners recorded their observations of students’ test-taking processes and evidence of students’ responses to content after the administration of each task type. The students were given an opportunity to provide feedback about their experience. Finally, test examiners were interviewed directly after the test administration.

**Findings and Recommendations**

The findings of this study have informed the test design and assessment development of the upcoming field test in the following areas: (1) assessment task design and development; (2) accessibility resources; and (3) test administration. Recommendations to improve task design and development included minimizing construct irrelevance, improving face validity (i.e., characteristics of the test that reflect what stakeholders expect) and using the English language development standards via the connectors for the target population. Recommendations on accessibility resources included improving the accessibility of the test content on the test delivery platform and providing guidance to test examiners to promote better understanding and correct usage of accessibility resources. Recommendations on test administration included providing training in multiple ways (e.g., online, face-to-face, and video), making practice tests available, and providing clear scoring rubrics for test examiners to familiarize test examiners with test administration practices. Details of the specific findings and recommendations are outlined in Attachment 1.

**Next Steps**

The next steps include preparation and administration of the Alternate ELPAC operational field test for the 2021–22 school year. In conjunction with field testing, two surveys will be conducted: an in-test survey, which will gather student-level information to support validity evidence, and a post-test survey, which will gather feedback from the coordinators and test examiners to help guide future assessment development activities. An updated timeline of Alternate ELPAC activities will be shared with the California State Board of Education in spring 2021.

## Attachment(s)

* Attachment 1: *Final Report for the Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessments for California Pilot Using Cognitive Lab Methodology* (92 Pages)