

# ELPA Validity Evaluation

## Creating Enhanced Home Language Survey Instruments



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## Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education funded Enhanced Assessment Grant *Evaluating the Validity of English Language Proficiency Assessments* (EVEA; CFDA 84.368) was awarded to the Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction of the State of Washington in fall 2009. The project involves five states, Idaho, Indiana, Montana, Oregon, and Washington working on collaborative and independent validity plans over an 18-month period. These states currently do not belong to an existing English language proficiency assessment (ELPA) consortium; rather they have each worked with commercial test developers to create state-wide ELPAs that are aligned with their state English language development (ELD) standards. The main project goal is for each state to create a validity argument for its ELPA system. Project outcomes include building individual State Interpretive Arguments, as well as a Common Interpretive Argument; designing and pilot testing a set of studies and instruments to support these arguments; and making instruments publically available at the close of the project for the wider education community to access.

## Background Context

One important challenge for states in the project and around the nation is to argue convincingly that they possess a fair and valid way in which to identify initially the population of K-12 students within the general student population to whom they administer their state ELPA (or initial placement test). All but four states currently use Home Language Surveys (HLS) to initially identify the pool of students who should be considered for further assessment or placement for English language support services.

## Statement of the Problem

However, there have been increasing concerns by parents, educators and the Office for Civil Rights that the questions on current HLS can lead to misidentification of this group of students, particularly if they require parents to identify only the child's first-learned language or indicate only whether the family speaks any language other than English. These kinds of questions do not reveal pertinent information about a student's current language dominance and exposure to English language and literacy.

## Purpose of This Document

This document guides the creation of enhanced HLS and a validity argument that the new responses to items will produce meaningful information so the HLS can be more effectively used for their intended purpose of initially identifying the English Learner (EL) population.

### *Creation of Instrumentation to:*

Enhance state Home language Surveys (HLS) so questions can better discriminate between students in the general K-12 students population who many need further assessment or placement for English language support services.

### *Claims and Underlying Assumptions*

Student intake procedures appropriately initially identify the EL population

- The HLS accurately identifies the population of prospective EL students for administering the state ELPA, or further screening and placement (as dictated by state practice).
  - Students identified by the HLS as needing further screening or ELD support actually do need



that support.

- Students determined by the HLS not to need further screening or ELD support have sufficient English skills to access the content in grade-level classes.

**Research Questions**

RQ1: To what degree is the state under/over-identifying students with their existing HLS?

RQ2: What characteristics do these over- and under-identified students have? Is the HLS systematically doing a poor job of identifying students for further screening/assessment who come from certain language, socioeconomic or ethnic backgrounds?

RQ3: Does an enhanced HLS with a more appropriate set of questions for parents better identify students who need further assessment or placement for services?

**Exhibit 1. Matrix of Validity Study Questions and Data Sources**

Questions	Data Source
To what degree is the state under-identifying students with their existing HLS?	The number of “missing” students who are not identified by the HLS as needing subsequent testing for EL support services but who are nevertheless later referred for screening or assessment by classroom teachers.
To what degree is the state over-identifying students with their existing HLS?	The number of students who are Initial-Fluent English Proficient (I-FEP) on the state ELPA when they are first tested.
What characteristics do these under- and over-identified students have? Is the HLS systematically doing a poor job of identifying students for further screening/assessment who come from certain language, socioeconomic or ethnic backgrounds?	Survey districts or obtain district data on the characteristics of three broad groups of students: 1) those who are identified as I-FEP during subsequent testing; 2) those who are identified as EL during subsequent testing; and 3) those who are not identified on the HLS as needing to be tested but who are subsequently referred by their teachers for testing and are found to be EL later on.
Does an enhanced HLS with a more appropriate set of questions for parents better identify students who need further assessment or placement for services?	Administer the new enhanced HLS as a pilot to determine whether hit-rates differ between the districts using the old versus new HLS.  <b>EVEA State Example:</b> The Bilingual and Migrant Education Division of OSPI in WA is deploying a newly modified survey to be used state-wide from January, 2011 onwards.



**Exhibit 2. Data Collection and Analysis Plan Summary by Research Question**

Questions	Data and Analysis
<p>To what degree is the state under-/over-identifying students with their existing HLS?</p>	<p>Conduct hit-rate analyses: the number of “false positives” and the number of “false negatives” in identifications. Determine how accurately students were identified (hits) by determining how many students receive English language services overall and then subtracting the number of students they may have over-identified (false positives) and under-identified (false negatives) at some meaningful point during the school year (i.e., the hit rate being the concordance between the original interpretations of the HLS responses and student performance on the ELPA used as a criterion test).</p> <p>Possibly also compare state percentages of IFEP students across the nation to establish a baseline hit rate “nom.”</p>
<p>What characteristics do these over- and under-identified students have? Is the HLS systematically doing a poor job of identifying students for further screening/assessment who come from certain language, socioeconomic or ethnic backgrounds?</p>	<p>Conduct descriptive statistics on the survey data to provide characteristics of students in the three broad groups (those who are identified as I-FEP, those who are identified as EL, and those who are not identified by the HLS but are subsequently referred by teachers for testing and later identified as EL).</p> <p>Conduct inferential statistics on the three groups to determine if any of the differences in characteristics are statistically significant. Interpret the results for any concerns/biases or unexpected findings.</p>
<p>Does an enhanced HLS with a more appropriate set of questions for parents better identify students who need further assessment or placement for services?</p>	<p>Compare hit-rates by the two versions of the HLS.</p> <p><b><i>EVEA State Example:</i></b> All districts in WA will likely implement the new HLS with their families next year thus comparisons of hit-rates across districts using the old HLS and districts adopting the new HLS will not exist (i.e., no opportunity for a natural experiment). However, comparison of hit-rates or changes to the state’s percentage of I-FEPs across years (old HLS to new HLS) will be possible.</p>



### *Sample Enhanced Survey Items by Language Background Constructs*

The following example items are intended to illustrate the range of items that can be considered and piloted on a new HLS. These items and others like them, should be studied for several aspects of validity including: 1) the appropriate wording of items for parents (e.g., parent interpretation of the meaning of these items) first needs to be tried out with parents of different background languages and SES characteristics and verified that the items can be understood and yield the type of information intended; and 2) the ability of these items to meaningfully identify which students in the general K-12 population should be included in state assessment and screening practices needs to be established.

#### ***Language dominance:***

Items should focus on the realistic options of language usage by students and their families, thus students may be dominant in English only, dominant in a language other than English or they may be considered “balanced bilinguals” speaking two or more languages including English fluently. Surveys that include items that distinguish comprehension (understanding) from production (speaking) and a student’s language preferences from language abilities can be utilized beyond the initial screening purposes of the HLS to also be helpful to classroom teachers for language programming. In the example items below only the response option (c) would factor into a decision to further assess or place a child in English language services.

#### **Example items: Identifying dominant language(s)**

*What language(s) does your child understand? (choose one response)*

- a) My child understands English;
- b) My child understands **both** English and one or more language(s) equally well;
- c) My child understands a language other than English but does not understand English well.

*What language(s) does your child speak? (choose one response)*

- a) My child speaks English;
- b) My child speaks **both** English and one or more language(s) equally well;
- c) My child speaks a language other than English but does not speak English well.

#### **Interpretation for Next Steps:**

- Responses with options (a) & (b): assume English comprehension/oral proficiency.
- Responses with option (c): administer English language proficiency screener/placement test/full ELPA (as determined by state practice).

#### **Example Items: Rating degree of English proficiency**

In the example items below the response option (b) & (c) would factor into a decision to further assess or place a child in English language services.

*How would you describe your child’s ability to understand English? (choose one response)*

- a) My child understands English very well;
- b) My child understands English moderately well;
- c) My child has difficulty understanding English.



*How would you describe your child's ability to speak English? (choose one response)*

- a) My child speaks English very well;
- b) My child speaks English moderately well;
- c) My child has difficulty speaking English.

**Interpretation for Next Steps:**

- Responses with option (a): assume English comprehension/oral proficiency.
- Responses with options (b) & (c): administer English language proficiency screener/placement test/full ELPA (as determined by state practice).

**Example Items: Identifying language preferences**

In the example items below the response option (b) would factor into a decision to further assess or place a child in English language services.

*Which language does your child prefer to speak? (choose one response)*

- a) My child prefers to speak English most of the time;
- b) My child prefers to speak another language most of the time.

**Interpretation for Next Steps:**

- Responses with option (a): assume English comprehension/oral proficiency.
- Responses with option (c): administer English language proficiency screener/placement test/full ELPA (as determined by state practice).

**English language exposure:**

Items focus on the range of oral language/literacy practices and activities in the home and other out-of-school contexts (e.g., after-school programs, summer camps, etc.) that provide students with support for informal opportunities to learn English. In the example items below only the response option (c) would factor into a decision to assess further or place a child in English language services.

**Example Items: Identifying language exposure**

*What language(s) do you (the parent) most often use to read to your child? (choose one response)*

- a) English;
- b) Both English and another language;
- c) A language other than English.

*What language(s) does your child most often prefer to speak when playing with friends (and parallel items for: relaxing with family/talking with neighbors/studying after school)? (choose one response)*

- a) English;
- b) Both English and another language;
- c) A language other than English.

**Interpretation for Next Steps:**

- Responses with options (a) & (b): Assume support for English proficiency.



- Responses with option (c): In combination with Language Dominance responses consider administer English language proficiency screener/placement test/full ELPA (as determined by state practice)

**Alternative Item Types: Rating amount of exposure**

*Do you or someone in your home read to your child in English?: (choose one response)*

- a) Often (everyday);
- b) Sometimes (1-2 per week);
- c) Never read to my child in English;
- d) Read to my child in another language.

**Interpretation for Next Steps:**

- Responses with options (a) & (b): Assume support for English proficiency.
- Responses with options (c) & (d): In combination with Language dominance responses consider administer English language proficiency screener/placement test/full ELPA (as determined by state practice)

Note: Language exposure items may need to be further studied to determine their role in decision making and interpretation for next steps.

