



What Does Meaningful Accessibility Really Mean?



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Educational Outcome

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Background

Approximately 60 individuals representing staff from state education agencies (SEAs), assessment vendors, and other organizations participated in a forum on June 28, 2023, in New Orleans, Louisiana to discuss issues surrounding meaningful accessibility of assessments. The forum was a post-session to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) National Conference on Student Assessment (NCSA) and was a collaboration of the *Assessment, Standards, and Education for Students with Disabilities* (ASES) Collaborative and the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO).

A specific goal of the forum was to gather representatives from SEAs, assessment vendors, assistive technology experts, and others to discuss the meaningful accessibility of assessments and to identify possible solutions to the challenges that students face when accessing assessments.

Purpose

The purpose of the forum was for participants to come together to better understand how accessibility and technology interact, the challenges that students and educators currently face, and how everyone can work together to improve testing for students with disabilities. This topic grew out of numerous conversations during which states indicated that they found it challenging to understand the role of technology in making assessments more accessible. Most people use technology devices every day. They text friends by speaking into phones, and then the phone reads their response. They use apps on an array of devices to do a million different things, from looking at constellations at night, to managing finances, to keeping notes for an upcoming presentation. Today, some people are using artificial intelligence to help them write, draw, and more. Yet, many of the same technologies that are taken for granted and that students use in their day-to-day lives are not always available to them in the classroom and are not permitted on assessments.

The forum addressed issues related to how SEAs, assessment vendors, and others could work together to improve assessment experiences for students with disabilities. These included: (a) How do SEAs provide guidance on accessibility? (b) What works well with the emerging accessibility and technology, and what does not? (c) Where do educators, vendors, etc. need to go from here, and how do they get there? and (d) What are the successes and barriers that students experience?

The forum began with a presentation from NCEO that provided an overview of the historical context of accessibility in assessments. This was followed by a state panel discussion with representatives from the SEAs in Mississippi, North Carolina, Utah, and Wisconsin, who discussed the guidance their SEAs provide on accessibility and challenges that states are facing. An expert

panel then provided input on the biggest challenges that are coming up and where they think the field needs to go. Following these panels, forum participants divided into four discussion groups to discuss the issues and identify needed resources. Participants self-selected one of four topic-based groups to participate in: (a) learners with high incidence disabilities; (b) learners with sensory disabilities; (c) learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities; and (d) English learners, including English learners with disabilities.

Each of these groups discussed the following questions:

1. What is working (the successes) for students?
2. What do you see as barriers to accessibility in assessment?
3. What needs to be done differently?
4. In a perfect world, what would meaningful accessibility look like for your group of students?

Group discussions were rich and engaging. The agenda was as follows:

- Welcome (Kathleen Airhart, CCSSO, and Sheryl Lazarus, NCEO)
- A Historical Context of Accessibility (Martha Thurlow, NCEO)
- State Panel (Moderator: Kathleen Airhart)
 - Tracy Gooley (Utah)
 - Iris Jacobson (Wisconsin)
 - Matthew Martinez (North Carolina)
 - Sharon Prestridge (Mississippi)
- Expert Panel (Moderator: Sheryl Lazarus)
 - Bob Dolan (Diverse Learners Consulting)
 - Meagan Karvonen (University of Kansas, ATLAS)
 - Cara Laitusis (ETS)
 - André Rupp (Center for Assessment)
- Breakout Discussions
 - Learners with high incidence disabilities (Facilitator: Kathleen Airhart)
 - Learners with sensory disabilities (Facilitators: Sheryl Lazarus and Sandra Warren, Independent Consultant)
 - Learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities (Facilitator: Andrew Hinkle, NCEO)
 - English learners, including English learners with disabilities (Facilitators: Kristi Liu and Martha Thurlow, NCEO)
- Reporting Out (Andrew Hinkle)
- Evaluation and Next Steps (Jason Altman, Sigma Associates and Sheryl Lazarus)

Forum Introduction

Kathleen Airhart (CCSSO ASES advisor) and Sheryl Lazarus (NCEO director) welcomed participants, provided an overview of the forum agenda, and recognized the hosts—CCSSO and NCEO. They noted that this forum was a great way to bring together people who would not normally have the opportunity to interact. They explained that ASES members help choose the forum topic, and this year’s topic was chosen because states are grappling with what meaningful accessibility really looks like.

A Historical Context of Accessibility

Martha Thurlow, a senior research associate at NCEO, began the session with an overview of the historical context of accessibility, especially as it relates to assessment. When NCEO was first started in 1990, the biggest accessibility issue was participation of students with disabilities in assessments. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was reauthorized in 1994 as the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA), creating the first federal requirements that states must have content standards and that the assessments based on those standards must include all students, including students with disabilities and English learners. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 1997, requiring that states include all students with disabilities in assessments in order to receive federal special education funding. IDEA also required that states create alternate assessments by 2000. When ESEA was reauthorized in 2001, it was dubbed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and was the first step toward real accountability connected to assessments. In 2004, the reauthorization of IDEA included students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and a requirement that states track how many students used accommodations. In 2008, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) expanded the definition of who may be considered as needing accommodations. In the 2010s, the Race to the Top funded consortia-developed assessments that were required to be accessible for all students. However, alternate assessments were ignored in Race to the Top, prompting the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to provide funding for alternate assessments. The 2015 reauthorization of ESEA as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) moved English learners into Title I accountability in addition to Title III accountability. Finally, in the 2020s, there is an ongoing expansion of technology that is interacting with the world of education, with new accessibility features and the use of artificial intelligence to support accommodations. This prompts the question, what does the future of accessibility look like?

Panel Discussion – State Perspectives

Panelists representing four states shared their perspectives on three questions. In response to the first question, panelists also introduced themselves and their role in the state education agency.

How Does Your SEA Provide Guidance on Accessibility?

North Carolina. Matthew Martinez, an Education Program Consultant II at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, explained that North Carolina used to have an entire assistive technology team, but this team was disbanded, so now there is a full-time position related to assistive technology. They are grappling with defining what is “accessible” or “accessibility” versus “assistive technology.” North Carolina is also dealing with issues related to augmentative and alternative communication devices (AAC) and security; for example, downloading test questions onto AAC devices would pose a test security issue, but this may limit accessibility of the questions for some students.

Utah. Tracy Gooley, a Special Education Assessment Specialist at the Utah State Board of Education, noted that there has been a big statewide initiative around inclusion. The State has created an inclusion team, implemented a statewide Portrait of Meaningful Inclusion, and held inclusion conferences across the state. This has helped create focus on accessibility and supports for students with disabilities. Many local education agencies (LEAs) have brought in various assistive technology programs as district-wide Universal Design for Learning (UDL) tools. A question that they have continued to explore is whether assessments are cognitively accessible to students and whether students are receiving the cognitive supports that they need to access the assessments. Additionally, there are questions about what shifts need to happen with UDL in assessments as UDL continues making shifts in how it is being implemented in the classroom.

Wisconsin. Iris Jacobson, a Special Education Consultant at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, noted that Wisconsin provides accessibility guides and guidance to districts similar to other states, and their assessment team collaborates with their special education team on a regular basis. She also shared that they did not have any positions related to assistive technology prior to the pandemic but that the pandemic brought attention to assistive technology needs. ESSA funds were used to develop an entire assistive technology workgroup with professionals including those with expertise in educational technology, informational technology, and English learners, as well as Wisconsin Department of Health and Human Services and higher education through the University of Wisconsin system. This assistive technology workgroup increased collaboration, awareness, and provisions of services related to accessibility across all Wisconsin state departments and agencies in the field.

Mississippi. Sharon Prestridge, the English Learner Program Coordinator and State Accommodations Coordinator at the Mississippi Department of Education, explained that the state recently wrote a new accommodations testing manual with two “golden rules” for accommodations: (1) Accommodations cannot interfere with what the test purports to measure; and (2) Accommodations cannot alter the construct of the test. This manual opened the door for some accommodations that might not currently be built into the assessments or assessment

platforms. Beginning in Fall 2023, requests for proposals (RFPs) for assessments will include details on accessibility and accommodations as per the new manual, including requirements for built-in technology for students with disabilities. Districts are still trying to get a handle on some technology-related accommodations such as assistive technology and speech-to-text. For example, Mississippi is currently grappling with how to handle a situation where a student has recent vision loss but has not yet learned braille. In order to graduate, students must pass the four state tests, but passages in the English language arts assessment cannot be read aloud, so how does this student access this assessment?

Accessibility and Technology – What Works Together Well in Assessment, and What Does Not?

North Carolina. The question of why these assessments exist in the first place is something to grapple with. North Carolina posed the question of what exactly states are trying to assess—is it word recognition on English language arts tests, or is it comprehension? The assessment methods are a little outdated compared to the technology that students use on a daily basis, but this then poses the question of how to assess what students actually know. The biggest issue with this is that teaching is a generation behind. In contrast to accessibility on assessments, instruction in North Carolina is going well, with teachers going to great lengths and accomplishing amazing feats to provide students with access to learning that they never had access to before.

Utah. UDL is working well for teachers in Utah in instruction, but the application of universal design principles to assessment is more challenging. There does not seem to be an alignment between instruction and assessment accessibility. There is a need to go back and look at the notion of what constructs are intended to be measured in assessments and to really focus on, and sometimes even question, the purpose of assessments when determining allowable accommodations.

Wisconsin. Collaboration is going well in Wisconsin, with systems in place to ensure that instruction and assessment align. One difficulty is that assessment vendors are not aware of what is happening in the classroom, so assessment platforms do not always have accessibility tools that match the tools students used during instruction and practiced with, which forces students to relearn the platform while taking the assessment.

Mississippi. The biggest issue that Mississippi is facing is with vendors. Vendors' technology has not caught up with current technology, so vendors need to look at updating what they provide to states. In general, technology has advanced a great deal in recent years, but education is still a generation behind. New technology has not been fully embraced, especially for English learners and students with disabilities.

What is Your Own Perfect System for Making Accessibility Possible?

North Carolina. In terms of instruction, every classroom should have a teacher with knowledge in technology and assistive technology. Additionally, teachers should all know how to integrate technology and provide it to all students at the same level. There is a need to address equity issues related to accessing technology. All students should have access to technology that is available during both instruction and assessment. This also requires rethinking why some things, such as speech-to-text and text-to-speech, are called accommodations when they are really just technology that students use every day both in and out of the classroom.

Utah. Decision-makers and testing vendors would spend time back in a classroom for a few weeks so they could see what is really happening in classrooms and which tools are being used. Additionally, the idea of “accommodations” would no longer exist; if a tool does not invalidate the construct being assessed, then all students would be allowed to use them.

Wisconsin. Universal accessibility would be the norm. Students would have access to assessments in whatever ways allow them to demonstrate their knowledge without altering the content of the exam. There would no longer be different tiers of accessibility features; students would be able to use whatever they needed.

Mississippi. Assessments would all be online with paper-pencil options. Every conceivable accommodation would be available, as long as it still followed the two “golden rules” (i.e., do not interfere with what the test purports to measure; cannot alter the construct). Students would have quarterly assessments based on what they learned during that period rather than one summative assessment at the end of the year that covered the entire year of learning, as breaking things up would give students a better opportunity to show what they know. Assessments would be intentionally written in an inclusive way that allows students to show what they know and can do using whichever accessibility features they would like to use.

Panel Discussion – Expert Perspectives

Four expert panel members were invited to provide their perspectives on three questions. In response to the first question, panel members introduced themselves and their organizations.

Initial Thoughts on State Panel Discussion

Cara. Cara Laitusis, most recently a principal research scientist at ETS, noted that it sounded like many of the challenges that states are facing have been around the technology used by test vendors.

Meagan. Meagan Karvonen, the director of Accessible Teaching, Learning, and Assessment Systems (ATLAS) at the University of Kansas, noted that the challenges she heard from states are the same challenges she has been hearing elsewhere. She said that one of the biggest challenges in addressing issues with assessment systems is their high stakes uses. Stakeholders prioritize stability because of the high stakes, and therefore are not always open to change. As such, there is a need to step back, revisit assumptions, and ask questions.

Bob. Bob Dolan, the founder and principal of Diverse Learners Consulting, explained that he has been thinking a lot about innovation and the next generation of teachers, and observing how large-scale, drop-out-of-the-sky assessment systems interfere with the new technologies being developed and implemented in learning. He also noted that the inherent tension of simultaneous local, state, and federal control of education adds another layer of complexity that can squash innovation. He stated that true, *learning*-oriented innovation in assessment system design has not been a priority, and as a result, assessment systems are just getting in the way of innovation.

André. André Rupp, a senior associate at the Center for Assessment, explained that many conversational threads come back to issues that get at the conceptual foundations of the work and associated systems thinking. He noted that while conversations around accessibility sometimes focus on specific assessments, technological solutions, or other issues in design, implementation and score use, there are several common threads that cut across these conversations such as concerns for equitable systems in which assessments are used, the validity and utility of the information that they provide for all learners, and how test security and comparability issues can be handled. While the nature of the conversations around these issues has changed over the years in important ways, the foundational relevance of many of these “deeper” issues remains.

Where Do We Need to Go, and How Do We Get There?

Meagan. Meagan Karvonen highlighted that accessibility is a complex issue. The first thing that comes to mind with accessibility currently is technology, but accessibility is about more than technology because students are interacting with peers, teachers, materials, etc., and need to be able to access all of these. Their interactions are mediated by disability, language, and cultural background. There is a need to think about the system more broadly and find high leverage points to make changes. For example, people in state departments of education often do not know about the assistive technology that is available and being used in classrooms. There is also a need to look for the problems that have not been identified yet rather than solely focusing on trying to solve the problems that are already known. She gave the example of how recent work on subsets of students with significant cognitive disabilities (i.e., those who are also English learners and those with dual sensory loss) has helped highlight unmet accessibility needs. Research needs to be iterative, rigorous, and transparent and explore what works, how, for whom, in what contexts, etc. Additionally, there is a need to rethink constructs so that they

are not barriers to accessibility. Conversations are needed about culturally relevant and sustaining assessments and broadening the definition of the constructs.

Bob. Bob Dolan stated that innovation is at the heart of things. Innovation occurs in the classroom with the next generation of motivated teachers bringing novel, out-of-the-box approaches and ideas. It also comes from places we in the assessment world do not typically watch, such as with invention of new learning technologies (e.g., cutting-edge tactile tablets designs) and the use of specialized furniture and classroom arrangements that allow students to engage with and access learning in new ways. Outdated models of assessment and psychometrics need to be abandoned when they interfere with innovation. Instead, decision makers must get into the classroom to see how things work in practice. The question then is: Who are the right people who need to be at the table in order to enact change? A radical answer to this is to let go of (or radically redesign) federal oversight of assessment and accountability and change requirements to better address the current context. Prior to NCLB, there were indeed some truly innovative, district-level approaches toward assessment, and we all know where those ended up. It *is* possible for innovation to scale up and for the federal government to support that process, but we do not have a good track record of that happening in assessment, and the current political climate has only made things worse.

André. André Rupp said that innovation in the classroom to support learning through new (or revisited) educational approaches and, in particular, new learning and assessment technologies should be encouraged, nurtured, and advocated for. Technologically, this includes allowing learners to engage in tasks with tools that they can have access to outside of school to allow them to most powerfully demonstrate what they are able to do. Rather than being afraid of what kinds of skills tools take off learners “cognitive plates,” tools should be embraced and allow for the design of more complex, cognitively challenging tasks. The people who are making meaningful instructional decisions should be the ones driving the change and moving the field forward; others should be there to support them rather than to constrain them artificially, especially if these constraints are anchored in the most limiting high-stakes assessment contexts. In addition, Rupp encouraged participants to think in a more differentiated sense about learning contexts and populations. For example, experiences in K-12 settings are very diverse—think of what learning looks like in kindergarten versus 5th grade versus 12th grade—but high-level conversations usually mention “K-12” as if this label represents a single, homogenous context. Accessibility issues play out very differently across these different learning spaces and contexts. This also prompts the question of whether accessibility is being discussed first and foremost in terms of certain kinds of high-stakes/diagnostic/interim/through-course assessments or in terms of inclusion, diversity, and equitable educational systems more generally. Educators on the ground, their local and state leaders, and the field as a whole need to at least reasonably agree on the foundational values, principles, and theories of action that guide the work; only then can meaningful decisions be made that will serve all students.

Cara. Cara Laitusis highlighted the tension inherent in balancing accessibility and flexibility on large-scale accountability assessments. Standards are at the center of so much of the work, and there is a need to better integrate all of the standards: assessment standards (AERA/APA/NCME, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2018) and technology standards (W3C, 1EdTech). One example she gave was the integration of the education *assessment standards* community with the *technology standards* community. She noted that the National Conference on Student Assessment (NCSA) occurs at the same time as the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) conference, so each year many technology experts need to miss NCSA and many assessment experts miss sharing the needs for accessibility with the technology vendors at ISTE. It would be better if there was more coordination so the two conferences could bring people together.

Another example Laitusis gave was integration with state academic *content standards*. What adults need to know and be able to do is rapidly changing. With this, there is a need to redefine standards related to both academic content, such as reading, and traits related to being human, such as social/emotional growth. Finally, she raised the issue of design for “*human standards*” and posed questions to consider:

- How do we want our assessments to make students feel?
- Do we want students to feel like they grew from last year? Like they will be able to make progress? Or like they are ‘not proficient’?

Laitusis then encouraged the audience to take the opportunity to get involved in standards integration and development. She shared that the Joint Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (AERA/APA/NCME, 2014) are in the early stage of revision and updates, and now is the time to develop and incorporate the W3C and 1EdTech standards for accessibility in technology.

Lightning Round – If You Were King or Queen, What Would Meaningful Accessibility Look Like for Students?

Bob. Bob Dolan stated that the blame cannot fall solely on the vendors; they are part of the problem, but they are not the whole problem. Additionally, there is a need to move beyond the concept of “accommodations,” as accommodations are retrofits for things that were designed poorly in the first place. Instead, assessments and instruction need to be designed to be inclusive from the beginning. The entire large-scale assessment structure is punitive and based on a foundation of mistrust. State, district, and school leadership, teachers, and students are told to get in line and comply. That must be turned around, starting by asking students—*all* students—how *they* would like to demonstrate what they know and can do, and then deeply listening to what they say. There is a whole lot of wisdom in the classroom, from a new generation of students and teachers, and we must empower them by running interference and allowing them to innovate.

André. André Rupp said the people who are directly involved and closest to the central accessibility problems should be those who get to determine how exactly the problem is framed, how it may be worked, and what outcomes would be most meaningful to them. They also should be the ones who are part of critical decision-making processes for solutions. The strongest “technical” solutions are, in the end, solutions that will address more complex social and systems change through engaging people, changing mindsets, and listening to those who have been marginalized and misrepresented. Learning from these communities about what they really want and need is critical to develop modern accessibility solutions that can be justified for different purposes.

Cara. Cara Laitusis noted that there should be no criteria for access. “Disability” is a social construct that takes up too much brainpower and time. The system has been constructed in a way that makes certain traits “bad” when this is not actually the case. The line between receiving accommodations or not should be removed.

Meagan. Meagan Karvonen said that tools should be ubiquitous and not mediated by others. The more we can focus on helping students develop the ability to select and use whatever accessibility tools would benefit them so that they can be more autonomous, the less we would need to focus on criteria and policies for determining who is allowed to use different tools, having teachers decide who qualifies to use tools. Accessibility decisions should support students’ cognitive engagement with assessment and instruction, not just solving for physical or sensory access and hoping learning happens.

Breakout Discussions

Following the panel discussions, meeting participants divided into discussion groups of their choice. Groups were formed around areas of interest (i.e., learners with high incidence disabilities; learners with sensory disabilities; learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities; English learners, including English learners with disabilities). Discussions focused on four questions, although not all questions were addressed in each group:

1. What is working (the successes) for students?
2. What do you see as barriers to accessibility in assessment?
3. What needs to be done differently?
4. In a perfect world, what would meaningful accessibility look like for your group of students?

Learners with High Incidence Disabilities

Successes for Students. Several successes were discussed:

- Progress toward meeting the 1.0% cap on participation in the alternate assessment
- Availability of accessibility features such as text-to-speech and speech-to-text
- Collaboration between state offices/departments is going well in many states
- General increase in accessibility of test items and assessments overall
- Use of software that supports text-to-speech in multiple states generally has a positive effect; however, there are also some challenges: students sometimes use text-to-speech on English language arts (ELA) passages when they do not need it, and there is a fear that teachers will stop teaching reading and that read aloud is being allowed too often; question of which grade levels should have text-to-speech available

Barriers to Accessibility. Participants identified various components that act as barriers to the accessibility of assessments:

- Misunderstandings that occur at the LEA level about guidance from the SEA
- Access to accessibility tools limited to “qualified” students
- Students’ lack of knowledge or inability to use accessibility tools
- LEAs’ and SEAs’ fear of getting in “trouble”
- Inoperability of accessibility features depending on test platform
- Teachers being overly concerned about allowing the use of accommodations and accessibility tools

What Needs to Be Different? Several potential changes were proposed and discussed:

- More consistent platforms and technology across instruction and assessment
- Involving students in decision-making process related to accessibility features, while empowering them to make and reflect on their own choices
- Better collaboration between different professionals involved in instruction and assessment (general education and special education teachers; curriculum, assessment, and special education staff; content staff and assessment staff)

Accessibility in a Perfect World. Participants identified what meaningful accessibility would look like for students with high incidence disabilities:

- All educators having a thorough understanding of accessibility and of how to advocate for students prior to beginning to teach
- Aligning assessment with instruction, not the other way around
- Addressing systemic issues within the education system, and changing the structure of the classroom and instruction rather than changing the students
- Assessments that are accessible but also meet validity and test security standards

Learners with Sensory Disabilities

Successes for Students. Participants noted several things that are working well for students:

- Communication between departments and within collaboratives
- Improvement in bias reviews to ensure accessibility during the item development process
- Various groups of individuals (e.g., curriculum staff, state level consultants) working really hard as advocates for students

Barriers to Accessibility. Various barriers were identified that may interfere with accessibility for students with sensory disabilities:

- Difficulty in appropriately identifying the assessment in which students should participate when issues relate to accessing the test materials (e.g., student who is not proficient in braille or sign language)
- Necessary curriculum is not always available to teachers
- Burden placed on teachers to make things accessible, which is not sustainable
- Shortage of critical staff, such as special education teachers or interpreters, and variability in their quality and skill levels
- Retrofitting access to assessments rather than designing assessments to be accessible to all students in the first place
- Lack of clarity on the appropriate use of interveners in assessments

What Needs to Be Different? Participants proposed several ideas about what should change:

- Building items and assessments with the students with the most complex disabilities in mind
- Encouraging creative psychometricians who can work with small sample sizes
- Better guidance related to accessibility features on test platform
- Exposing students to test platforms prior to assessment, teaching them the layout, and showing them how to access the tools
- Better understanding of how to teach deaf children how to read

Accessibility in a Perfect World. Numerous visions of meaningful accessibility in a perfect world were discussed:

- Moving away from the word “accommodations” and making all tools that do not change the construct of the test available to all students
- Using one platform for both instruction and assessment with tools that are seamless and easy for students to navigate
- Putting decision makers back in classrooms to better understand what learning actually looks like for students today
- Increasing presence of advocates in spaces where decisions are being made
- Reporting to students and families/caregivers in an assets-based format that highlights what students can do
- “Personal passports” that document students’ needs and travel with them from classroom to classroom/teacher to teacher

Learners with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Successes for Students. Several things that have been working well for students were mentioned:

- Assistive technology allows more access to assessments
- Communication devices, like AACs, provide a way for students to be able to communicate and participate
- Accountability related to participation positively impacts accessibility
- Partnership with vendors that improves access to reading for students via text-to-speech and other tools
- Related service providers as an excellent resource for assisting with accessibility

Barriers to Accessibility. Participants noted several barriers that prevent students from having meaningful access to assessments:

- Parents' fear of their child failing
- Test security preventing the download of items onto communication devices
- Lack of high expectations for students taking the alternate assessment
- Lack of knowledge about what is available to help students
- Medical model approach to education requiring that students must demonstrate their need before receiving access to supports
- Lack of high-quality instruction and professionals
- Lack of communication and collaboration between special education and general education teachers
- Students' lack of understanding about how to use the technology and accessibility tools available

What Needs to Be Different? Several ideas were discussed about what should be changed:

- Pushing LEAs and curriculum developers to make everything accessible
- Review of accessibility for all students but especially students who take the alternate assessment
- Pushing for the development of products that include consideration of accessibility from the start
- Providing teachers with the resources they need to meet the needs of all students
- Alleviating teacher isolation and shifting their mindsets to a more collaborative approach to making accessibility decisions
- Ensuring that students who take the alternate assessment are not following a separate curriculum
- Focusing on specially-designed instruction

English Learners, Including English Learners with Disabilities

Successes for Students. Participants highlighted numerous areas that are working well for students:

- Changing the language in policies about accessibility and accommodations that tends to be associated only with students with disabilities
- New measures, such as English language proficiency (ELP) screeners, alternate ELPs, and surveys for parents
- Professional development modules about multilingual learners and accessibility supports
- Stronger connections between ELP assessments and content standards
- Linking assessments with instruction and learning
- Involving students' voices in determining what works

Barriers to Accessibility. Several barriers to accessibility for English learners and English learners with disabilities were identified:

- Costs of accessible assessments
- Teacher shortages
- Staff turnover at SEAs
- Lack of longitudinal data that could be used to track changes over time
- Instruction and assessment that is not student centered
- Test security that interferes with accessibility
- Limited languages available for translation
- Generational divide related to technology and students' abilities
- Difficulty defining the constructs that are intended to be measured and fluidity of the constructs
- Equity of technology available to students

What Needs to Be Different? Participants proposed several ways to do things differently:

- Continuity of technology access, with equitable access both in and out of school
- Shared responsibilities within the school with trained staff
- Guiding technology development and technology standards based on educational needs

Accessibility in a Perfect World. Participants discussed what meaningful accessibility would look like in a perfect world:

- Instruction and assessment that are fully student centered
- Students identifying and accessing tools they determine they need
- Changing federal law to have common language

Reporting Out

Andrew Hinkle facilitated a brief sharing of group discussions. A reporter from each group provided the whole group with a high-level summary of key points from their discussion.

Evaluation and Next Steps

Jason Altman (Sigma Associates), who serves as an external evaluator for NCEO, provided participants with information on how to access an evaluation survey and asked participants to take a few minutes to complete the survey.

Sheryl Lazarus shared that the next steps would be an NCEO report on the forum and thanked everyone for their time and participation.

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