Strengthening Assessment for English Learner Success:
Challenges and Choices Facing California

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Purposes of Today's Presentation

- Set key points of understanding regarding EL population
- Examine implications of common core state standards (CCSS)
- Discuss how assessment systems can be more responsive to ELs
- Highlight a few policy challenges and choices facing California

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Key points

1. Defining & monitoring EL population is critical (and currently poorly done)

2. English-language proficiency is fundamental to academic achievement

3. Common core standards change the game for ELs and their teachers

Key points

4. *Comprehensive* assessment systems can better respond to EL strengths & needs

5. Accommodations – no panacea – can improve access and validity when configured correctly

6. EL-responsive assessment innovations hold promise and risk: Pursue carefully

7. ELP & academic assessment developers must collaborate or ELs pay the price

If an English learner performs poorly on academic content assessment…

is it due to…

- Insufficient language proficiency to demonstrate content knowledge?
- Lack of content knowledge? (*opportunity to learn* content?)
- Construct-irrelevant interference? (Unnecessarily complex language)
- Other sources of bias or error? (Cultural distance, dialectical variation, rater misinterpretation)

1. Defining & monitoring EL population is critical (and currently poorly done)

- ELs very diverse, yet seen monolithically
- EL status is temporary, instructionally dependent – unique subgroup
- Successful ELs exit EL cohort, leaving more lower-performing and newly arrived
- Better performing *by definition*, exited ELs may still have linguistic, academic needs
- Monitor progress in ELP by time, in academics by ELP and time

Accurate, Meaningful Accountability Requires a Stable EL Subgroup

Students Who Began as ELs
(English Proficient Learners)

Met state reclass criteria

Should meet grade-level proficiency; Count in subgroup to hold accountable for equity & access

Current ELs

1-5 yrs in state schools
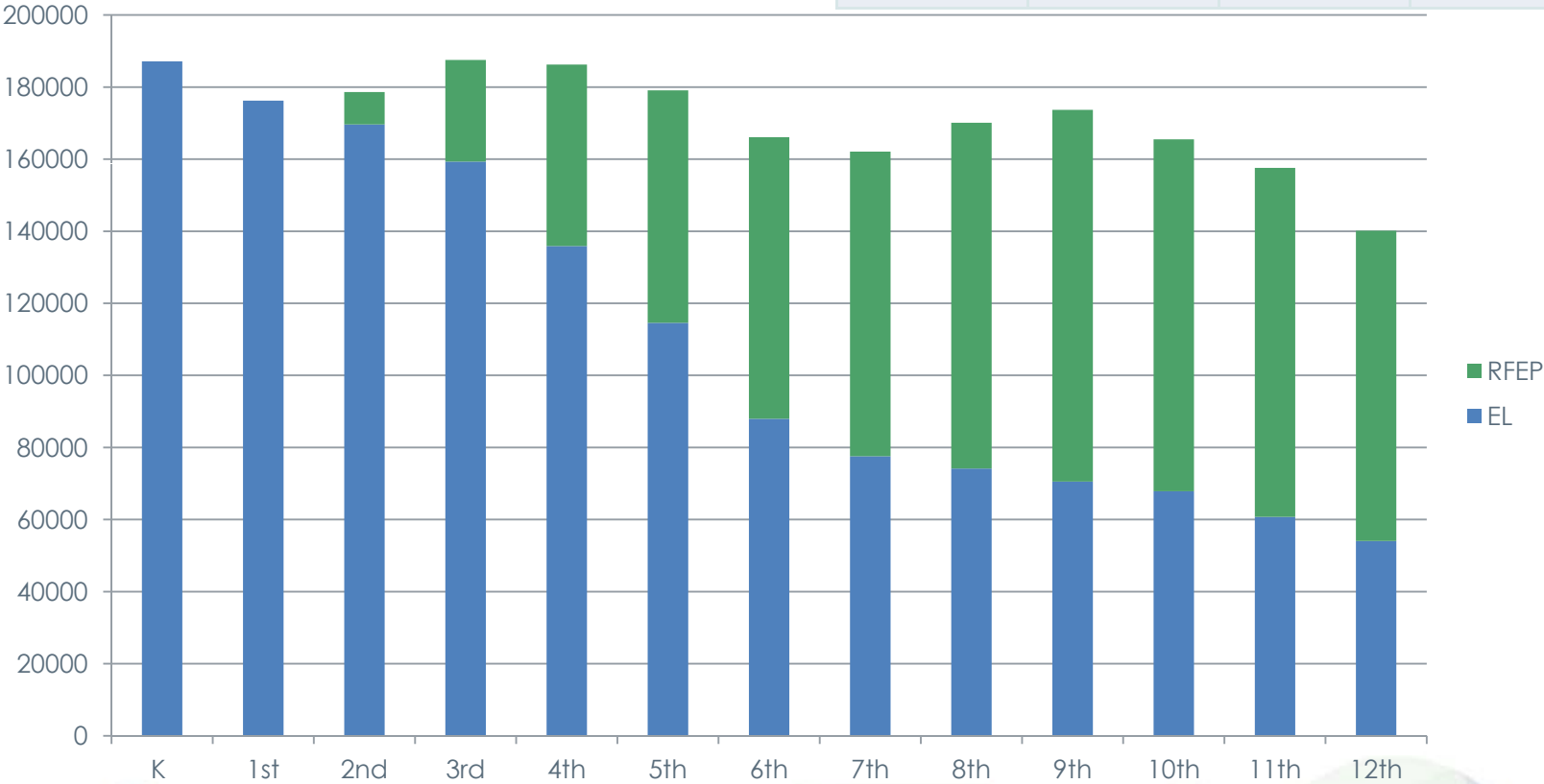
Should meet annual ELP & academic progress goals

Long-term ELs

6 or more yrs. in state Schools

% should decrease annually

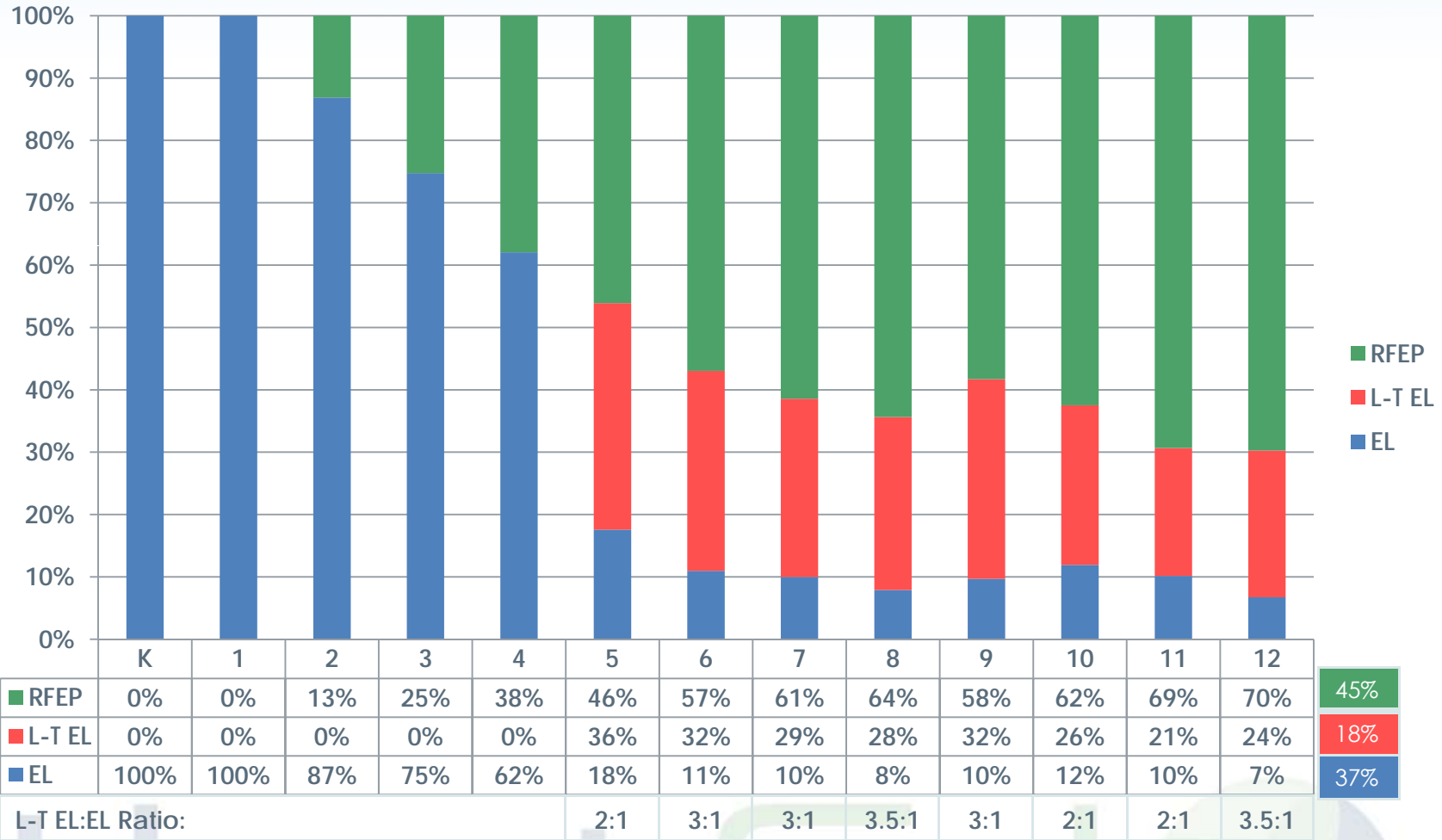Working Group on ELL Policy, 2011 (www.Ellpolicy.org)

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CA ELs and former ELs (RFEP) by grade

Ever-EL	K-5	6-12	Total
EL	86%	43%	1,435,734
RFEP	14%	57%	794,467

Legend: RFEP (green), EL (blue)

Source: CDE DataQuest, 2010-11 CELDT & CST

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District ELs, Long-Term ELs and Former ELs (RFEP) by grade

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
RFEP	0%	0%	13%	25%	38%	46%	57%	61%	64%	58%	62%	69%	70%	45%
L-T EL	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	36%	32%	29%	28%	32%	26%	21%	24%	18%
EL	100%	100%	87%	75%	62%	18%	11%	10%	8%	10%	12%	10%	7%	37%
L-T EL:EL Ratio:						2:1	3:1	3:1	3.5:1	3:1	2:1	2:1	3.5:1	

Long-term EL: 6 or more years in LEA

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2. English-language proficiency is fundamental to academic achievement: Must measure and monitor both

Distribution of 4th Grade CST Math Scores by English Proficiency Level, 2009

Estimated Probability of [ ] Reaching English Proficiency Milestones by Number of Years in the District for Students Who Entered K in 2002-03
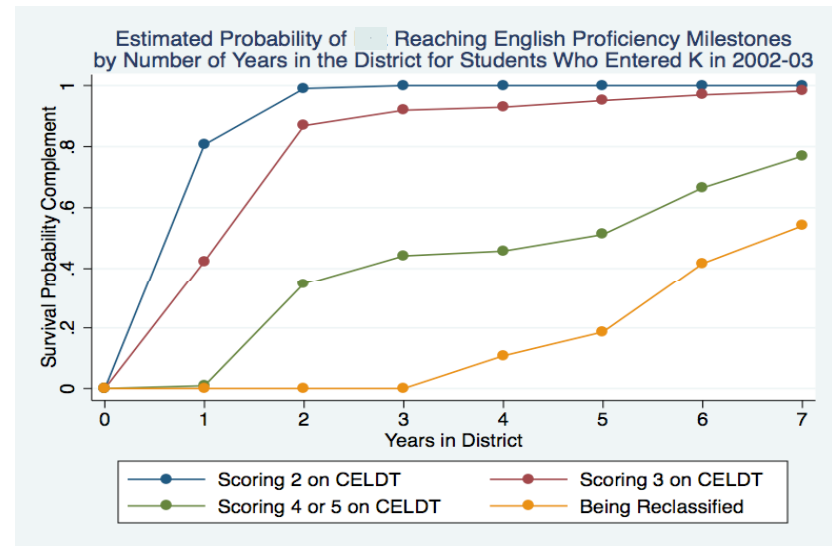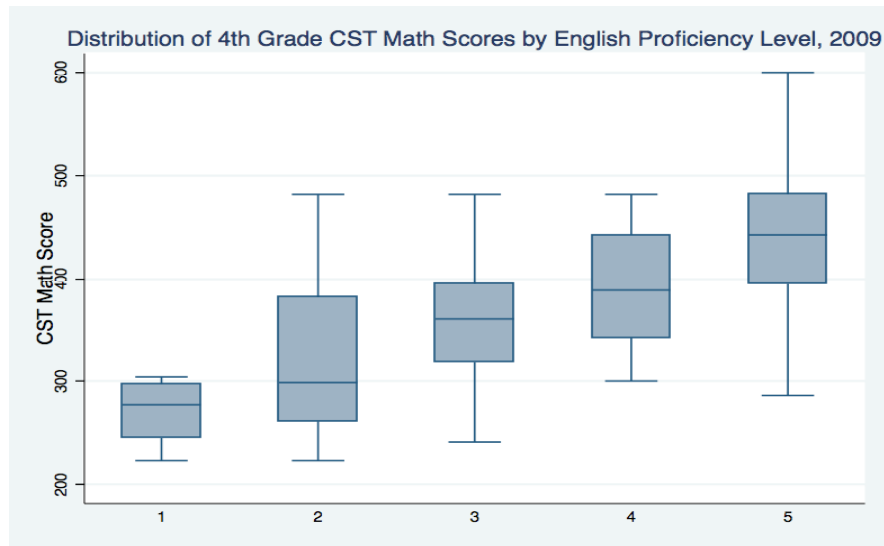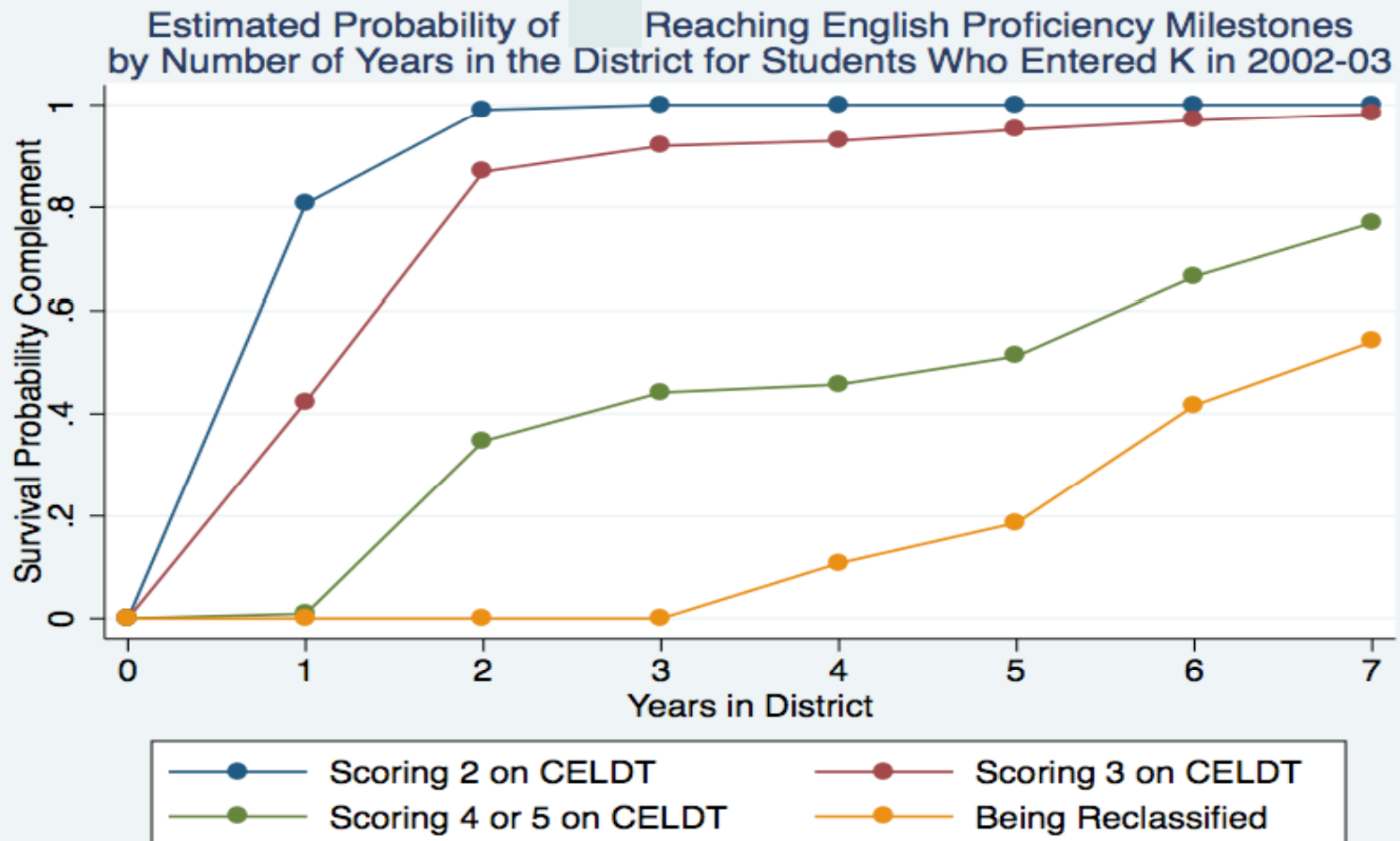
ELs' English Language Proficiency Level Affects their Academic Performance

Figure 1. Distribution of EL student performance on academic assessments in English-language arts and math by English proficiency level, third grade.
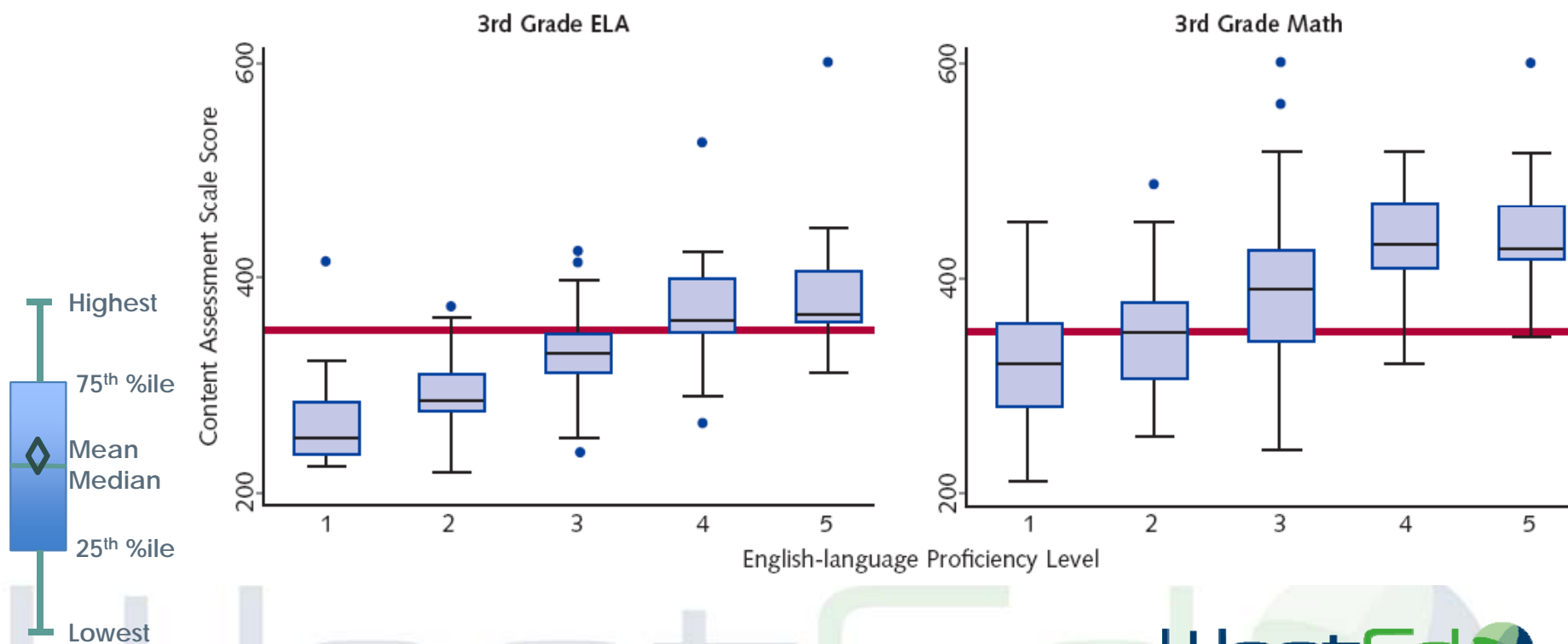
It Takes ELs Time to Learn Academic English

Estimated Probability of Reaching English Proficiency Milestones by Number of Years in the District for Students Who Entered K in 2002-03

Thompson & Hakuta, 2011

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Set timeframes for ELP Progress & Attainment

Expected English Language Proficiency Progress

Entry Point (time zero)	Time (academic years)				
	1 Year	2 Years	3 Years	4 Years	5 Years
1	2	3	4	4	5
2	3	4	4	5	
3	4	4	5		
4	4	5			
5	IFEP (not ELL)				

Initial English Proficiency Level

These expectations reflect individual EL's AMAO 1 & AMAO 2 criteria
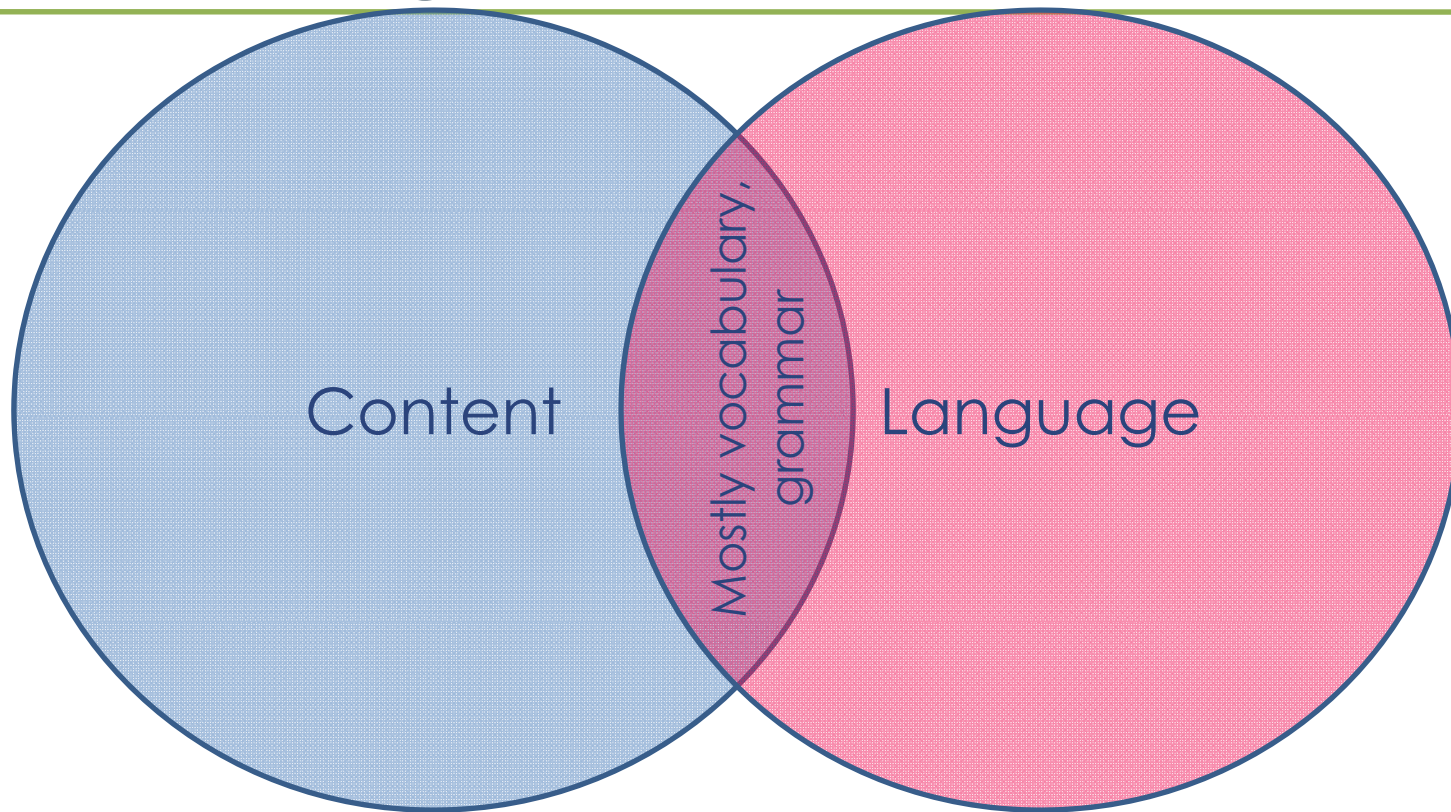
Set academic progress benchmarks

- Use progress benchmarking, indexed progress, growth/status models
- By expected ELD level (or actual if higher)
- Discussion-starter methods coming…

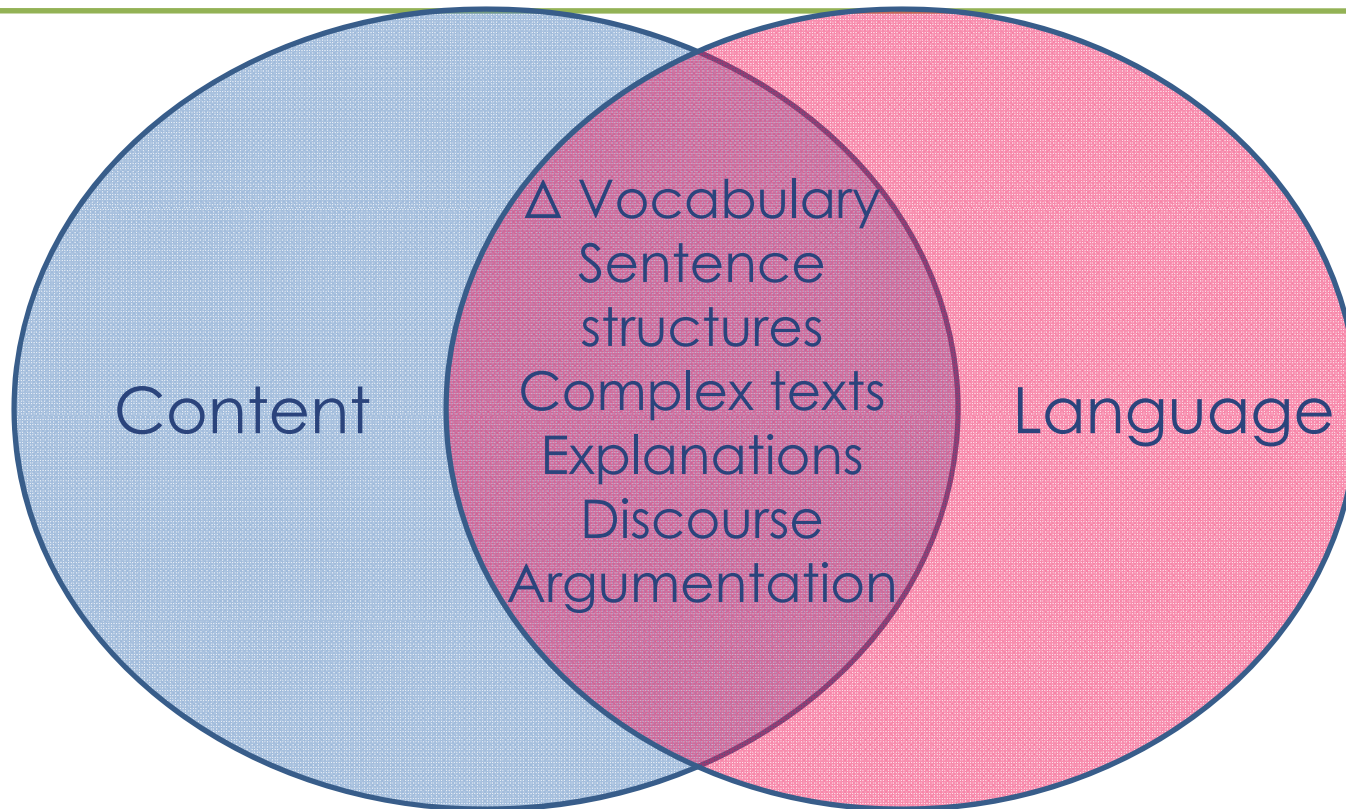# 3. Common core standards change the game for ELs and their teachers

- Sophisticated academic language skills needed to perform and master subject matter
- All teachers must engage students to develop and use language forms and functions of the disciplines (major PD challenge)
- Map out key academic language competencies and target language uses
- Define language learning progressions in ELP standards & assessment specs

Old Paradigm

Content

Mostly vocabulary, grammar

Language

New Paradigm

Content

Language

Δ Vocabulary
Sentence structures
Complex texts
Explanations
Discourse
Argumentation

COMMON CORE
STATE STANDARDS INITIATIVE
PREPARING AMERICA'S STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE & CAREER

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Sample Speaking and Listening standards

Comprehension and collaboration

- Engage effectively a range of collaborative discussions…on grade level topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly (grades 3-5)
- Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence (11)

Presentation of knowledge and ideas

- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, using formal English when appropriate…

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Sample reading standards in science (grades 9-10)

Reading standards for literacy in science and technical subjects:

3. Follow precisely a complex multistep procedure when carrying out experiments, taking measurements, or performing technical tasks attending to special cases or exceptions defined in the text.

7. Translate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text into visual form (e.g. a table or chart) and translate information expressed visually or mathematically (e.g. in an equation) into words.

9. Compare and contrast findings presented in a text to those from other sources (including their own experiments), noting when the findings support or contradict previous explanations or accounts.

Sample writing standards in science (grades 9-10)

Writing standards for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects:

1. Write arguments focused on *discipline-specific* content.

a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying data and evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both claim(s) and counterclaims in a discipline-appropriate form...

c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

Challenges for Students:
They need to…

- extract meaning from complex texts
- explain and demonstrate their knowledge using complex language in varying contexts
- engage in productive group work with peers and effective interactions with teachers

Challenges for Teachers:
They need to...

- teach for understanding and productive application –more complicated than teaching discrete pieces of knowledge and skills

- see themselves as teachers of language performance in addition to role as teachers of content area

- develop new ways of motivating and enabling students to use language in the classroom to perform in the content areas

Challenges for Support Systems

- Existing ways to support teachers and administrators – through coaching and supervision, professional learning communities, and professional development opportunities – must attune to and build capacity to meet the increased demands surrounding content and language.

Challenges for Publishers

- Existing materials inadequately matched to the new content, particularly as the new content requires far greater language use
- Current strategies to make materials more accessible for ELs (e.g., glossaries and highlighted vocabulary) inadequate to address language demands inherent in the new standards

Challenges for Assessment Systems

The new content assessments:

- must yield valid inferences for ELL students at varying levels of English language proficiency.
- must be unbiased with respect to language, even while language has become part of the new definition of content!

The new English language proficiency assessments:

- must reflect and measure the language demands inherent in the content standards.
- must capture the breadth, depth, and complexity of receptive and productive language capacities.

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4. *Comprehensive* assessment systems can better respond to EL strengths, needs

- **Formative** assessment critical for ELs as most instructionally relevant
- **Interim/thru-course** assessments must match the intended uses with opportunity to learn
- **Summative** assessment must strengthen the signal & manage expectations
  - EL-responsive access and accommodations
  - Even incremental validity gains help

Effective formative assessment is a *process* teachers and students use

- ✓ Teachers adjust teaching in response to assessment evidence
- ✓ Students receive feedback on learning with advice on how they can improve
- ✓ Students participate through self-assessment
- ✓ Strengthens teacher capacity to stage EL language and content learning

FA in a Teaching/Learning Paradigm

- PARCC + SBAC talk of "using information formatively" or "formative processes" as tools
- Missing: Hallmarks of effective FA
  - Working from students' emerging understandings
  - Supporting learning through instructional scaffolding
  - Including feedback
  - Actively involving students in assessment/learning process
- Instead of seeing FA within measurement paradigm, place within teaching & learning
  - Assessment *for* and *as* learning

Heritage, 2008, 2010

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Sample formative assessment efforts for ELs

FLARE Formative Assessment Model

Language Learning Targets
Establishing Goals & Instruction
Feedback & Re-Teaching
FLARE ASSESSMENTS
Benchmark Tests
Assessment Toolbox
Student Self Assessment

FLARE Website:
www.flareassessment.org

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QUALITY TEACHING for English Learners

- Content learning progressions with associated language learning targets
  - PD models that build teacher capacity to develop disciplinary language within content instruction with feedback on progress toward instructional goals

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5. Accommodations can improve access & validity *when configured correctly*

- Accommodations research findings mixed
  - 20-25% gap reduction using English dictionaries/glossaries
  - Plain language approaches vary in impact
- Hard to disentangle reasons for this
  - Necessary language complexity of learning strand?
  - Aggregate findings mask which work for which ELs?
- Promising: Assign configurations of accommodations by student profile/need
  - Emerging evidence of increased effectiveness

Kieffer et al., 2009; Kopriva et al., 2007

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EL-responsive accommodations

English-language supports:

- English dictionary/glossary with extra time
- Plain English (vary)

(Pennock-Roman & Rivera, 2011)

Primary-language supports:

- Primary-language versions (at Low ELP levels or receiving L1 instruction)
- Dual language (parallel bilingual) with extra time

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6. EL-responsive assessment innovations hold promise and risk: Pursue carefully

Multi-semiotic approaches:

- Target ELs at lowest ELP levels in math and science
- "Language minimizing" must be seen as temporary

Computer adaptive assessment:

- Should differentiate language load of construct-equivalent items
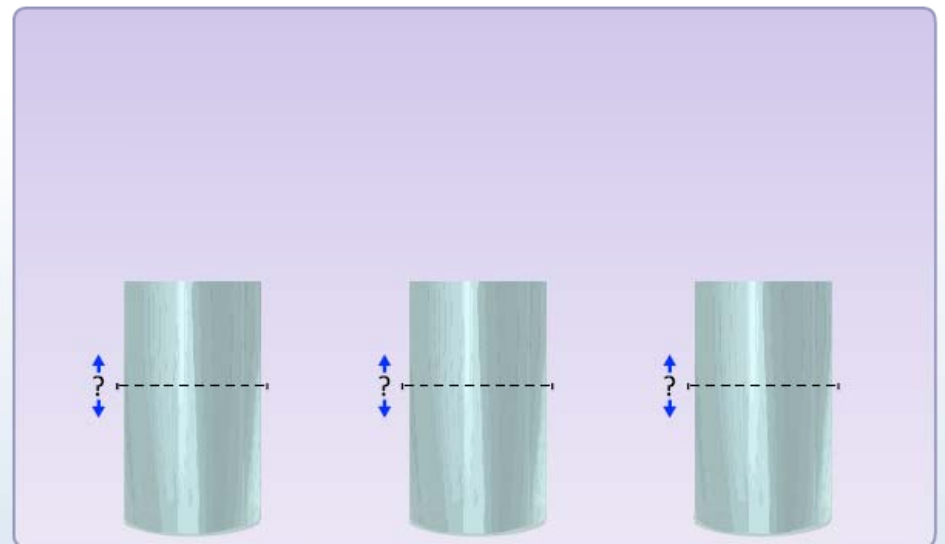- Automated scoring routines should recognize inter-language features

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Assessing science knowledge of beginning-ELP Level ELs
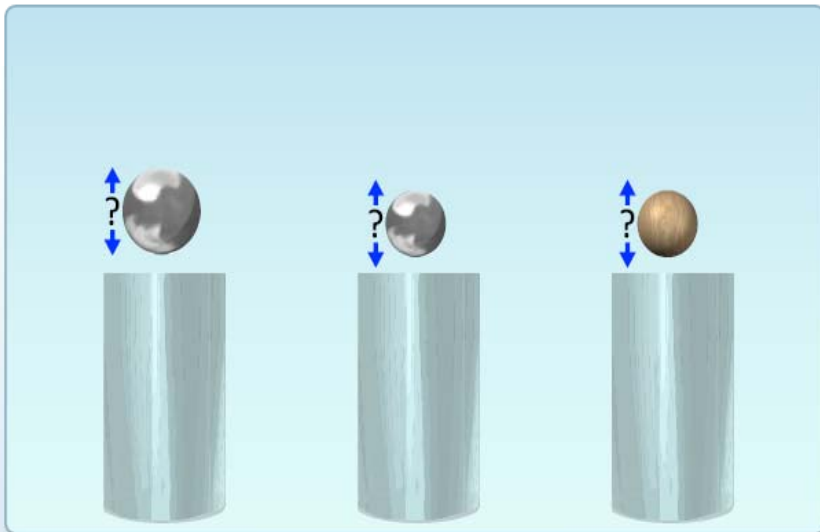
Source: www.ONPAR.us

Assessing math knowledge of beginning-ELP Level ELs
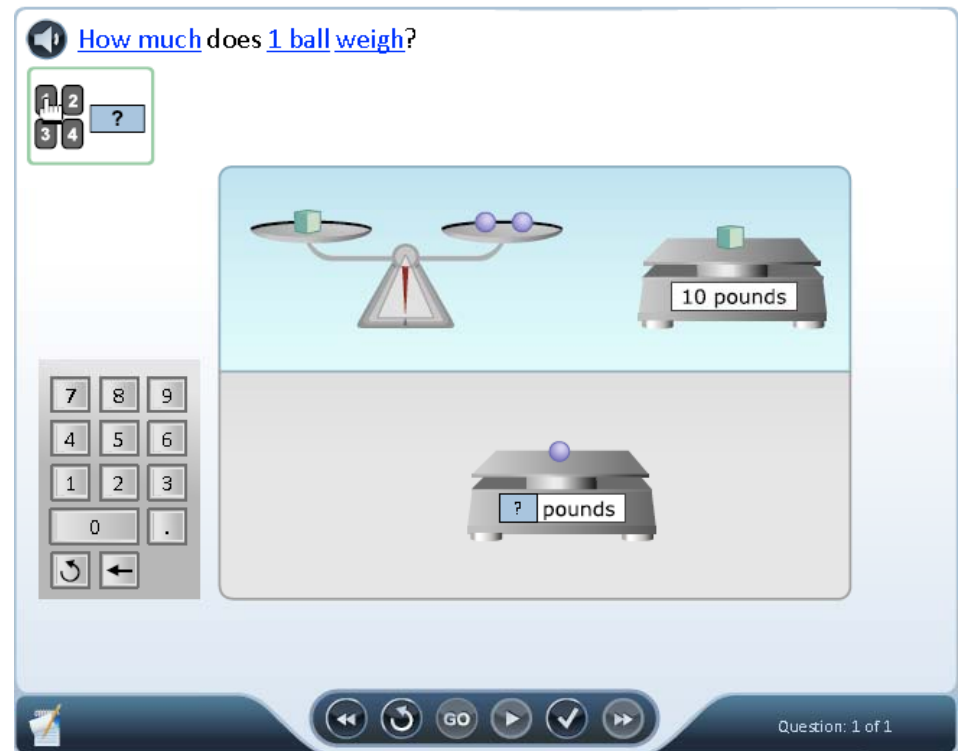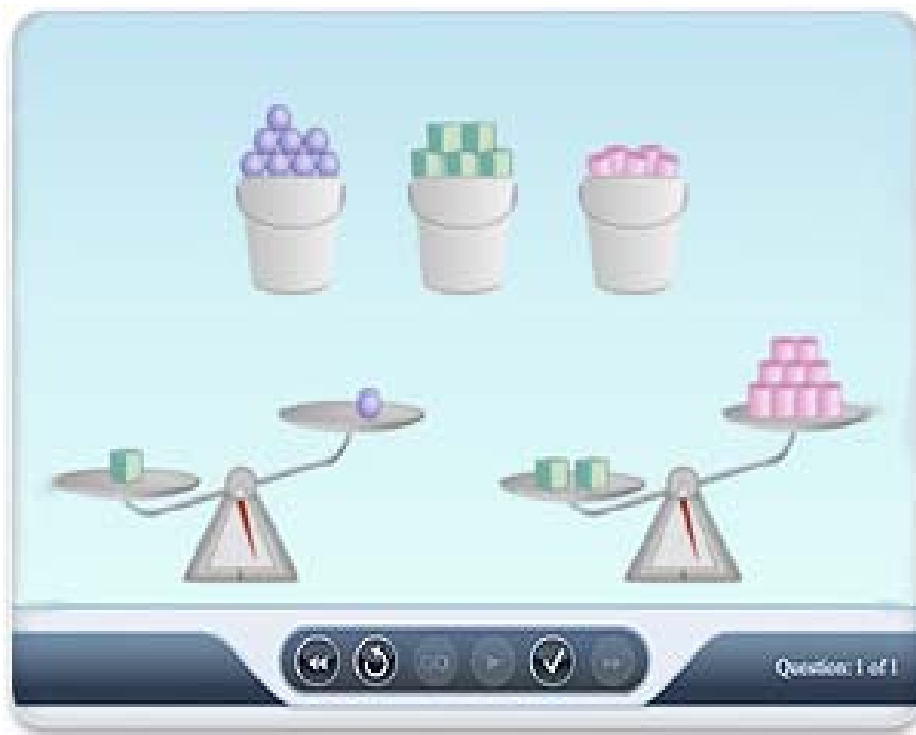
7. ELP consortia & academic assessment consortia must collaborate or ELs pay

SBAC & PARCC:

- $180 M each
- Comprehensive assessment system
- Use Common Core state standards
- Common definition of EL across member states

~ Two ELP consortia:

- One funded at $10 M
- Diagnostic/placement & summative only
- Align to CCSS (but no funds for ELP standards)
- Common definition of EL across member states

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: California's Lead Role

- As a lead state, positioned to exert substantial influence on system's responsiveness to EL needs
- Ensure computer adaptive tech works for ELs
  - Item/task prototyping sensitive to ELP levels
  - Automated scoring sensitive to EL language features
  - State infrastructure (digital divide works against resource-poor schools and ELs in them)
- Push development of formative assessment processes, practices and tools emphasizing ELs
- Urge collaboration with ELP test developers, PD

California's decision on ELP assessment consortium

- Currently one federally-funded consortium (WIDA ASSETS, with 28 states, 20% of ELs)
- Other consortium not funded this year (CCSSO-ELAAS, with 18 states, 50+% of ELs)
- California's options:
  - Join ASSETS
  - Go it alone
  - Participate in ELAAS
  - Lead ELAAS

  Need next-generation ELP Standards

Revise ELD standards to reflect language demands of common core

- AB 124 defines process & timeline for ELD standards revision (to ELA only!)
  - Convene committee of experts
  - Draft to State Board by August 2012
  - Board adopts, rejects, or revises by Sept 2012
  - If revised, adopt revisions by November 2012
- Standards form base for new ELD test specs

What Would Help?

Set expectations, measure growth and status

- For ELs: Disaggregate & Report…
  - » ELD level by initial level & years in state
  - » Academic progress by ELD level (& time)
  - » Long-term ELs, former ELs

Build teacher and administrator capacity

- Discipline-specific language use in content instruction
- Formative assessment practices

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What Would Help?

- Foster PD models & learning communities to develop pedagogy for new standards where language plays key role

- Support content and ELD test developers to identify overlaps between content and language that might provide linkage between both systems

What Would Help?

- Help school systems provide comprehensive support for ELs as they implement the new standards

- Use technology to help students and teachers make sense of the language and text complexities embedded in the new standards

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The Potential of Technology

Increase opportunities for ELs to engage with and build capacity in language by:

- Building background knowledge through multimedia

- Creating compelling presentations

- Building models (especially in science and math)

- Participating in online communities (speaking, writing and responding to others)

- Providing automated search and sorting of texts, digitized speech materials to support learning.

How will California leverage its resources to lead on EL innovation?

SBAC

California
(and Friends)
Understanding Language Initiative
TA/PD Infrastructure
(REL-W, AACC, CACC, CRESST, CABE, CATESOL, COEs, IHEs)
Foundations
Test developers
Publishers …

ELAAS?
Solo?

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