Approaches to Instruction and Assessment for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

who are English Learners

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Author Note

Abstract

The small subset of students with significant cognitive disabilities who are English learners (SCD-EL) are receiving increased focus due to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; ESSA, 2015) requirement that states provide an alternate English language proficiency assessment for students with SCD-EL and, for the first time, measure their achievement against alternate achievement standards. Research is needed to better understand the academic instruction and assessment needs of these students. We interviewed 10 teachers of students with SCD-EL to ascertain how they identify and meet the unique needs of this student sub-population. Results suggested that while teachers generally don't differentiate instruction or assessment for students with SCD-EL, teachers would appreciate professional development opportunities and other informal support systems to help them identify and address the specific language development needs for this group of students.

Keywords: English learner, disability studies, instructional practices, academic assessment

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Disabilities who are English Learners

The small subset of students with significant cognitive disabilities who are English

learners (SCD-EL) is receiving increased state and national focus due to the Every Student

Succeeds Act (ESSA; ESSA, 2015) requirement that states provide an alternate English language

proficiency assessment for students with SCD-EL. Further, for the first time, these assessments

may include the specification of alternate achievement standards (Rooney, 2017). However,

there is no current federal or state definition of who would take these assessments, and

identification of students in this subgroup remains a challenge (Christensen, Gholson, & Shyyan,

2018; Karvonen & Clark, in press). To meet the complex language acquisition and academic

needs of students with SCD-EL, states must not only identify these students but also understand

their unique characteristics that influence how they learn and demonstrate what they know and

can do. This study expands what is known about this small sub-population of students by

interviewing teachers of likely students with SCD-EL to learn how they approach instruction and

assessment. We summarize findings related to identifying and meeting students' language and

disability needs, approaches to instruction and assessment, accessibility supports, and

communicating with parents.

Background

Students with disabilities and English learners (ELs) have historically been treated as

distinct subgroups in state reporting. Despite the small sample size, students with disabilities

who are also ELs are now a third group referenced in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA;

ESSA, 2015), and, in recent years, there has been recognition of the overlap of students with

disabilities and ELs. The Council of Chief State School Officers Accommodations Manual includes guidance for students with disabilities who are ELs (Shyyan et al., 2016).

Most educational research has examined EL students with high-incidence disabilities and has focused on identification and placement. Less is known about students with SCD-EL, who make up a very small portion of the 1% of students eligible to take alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards. Simply identifying these students has been a challenge; state data systems do not currently identify these students (Ghoson, 2018). Further, their significant cognitive disability may mask their second language acquisition needs (Thurlow, Christensen, & Shyyan, 2016) or impact their responses to second language screeners (Christensen et al., 2018). The Alternate English Language Learning Assessment Project (ALTELLA) defines these students as "individuals who have one or more disabilities that significantly limit their intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior as documented in their IEPs, and who are progressing toward English language proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding" (Christensen et al., 2018, p.3). Thurlow and colleagues (2016) estimated the total percent of students with SCD-EL in public schools is around 0.09% of all students. These students are primarily served in self-contained special education classes and many do not receive services English language development (Christensen, Mitchell, Shyyan, & Ryan, 2018).

Students with SCD may face a number of challenges when acquiring language, and these challenges may be compounded if the student's first language is not the language of instruction, usually English. Students with intellectual disabilities, for example, struggle with learning, phonological working memory, information processing, and analytic reasoning in general, which impacts the timing and tempo of their language development (Van der Schuit, Segers, Balkom,

& Verhoeven, 2011). Students acquiring a second language rely strongly on phonological short-term memory and analytic reasoning abilities to develop both vocabulary and syntactic knowledge in the new language (Paradis, 2011). Students with SCD-EL must not only navigate delayed development of their native language as a result of their disabilities, but also the acquisition of a second (or sometimes third) language.

Instructional Strategies for English Learners

To identify effective instructional strategies for students with SCD-EL, we first look at strategies for EL students in general education. In a review of effective programs for ELs, Calderon, Slavin, and Sanchez (2011) concluded that either bilingual or structured English immersion programs can positively impact reading achievement of language minority children. Some element of the students' native languages must be present in the classroom environment to aid ELs (Calderon et al., 2011; Ortiz & Robertson, 2018). Teachers can strategically use students' primary languages during instruction by signaling that home languages and cultures are valued, encouraging students to use their native language with language peers, and pairing new students with experienced language peers. Several studies have found that ELs achieve better outcomes and acquire second languages more quickly when they receive instruction in their native language (e.g., Collier & Thomas, 2004; Goldenberg, 2008).

Calderon et al. (2011) claim that it is the quality of school leadership, instruction, and parent relationships that ultimately impact students' outcomes. The elements of the most effective practices at the school-leadership level include data collection and use of formative assessment to monitor teaching and learning, professional development for staff members, and information sharing among staff. For language and literacy development, Calderon et al. (2011) observed that intensively building students' English vocabulary using "rich and varied language

experiences" (p.110), including read-aloud, facilitated discussion, and writing, not only benefit students' reading comprehension, but also their phonological awareness and language fluency. They recommend dividing instruction time among defining vocabulary, decoding, grammar, background knowledge, and reading comprehension skills for ELs.

Finally, parent involvement in their children's education is important for all students, but Goldenberg, Rueda, and August (2006) note that open communication and positive relationships are especially crucial for immigrant and language minority students. In addition to addressing factors external to the school environment that impact immigrant children's development, such as adult literacy or issues related to poverty, schools can also invite parents to volunteer, provide parenting group programs, and encourage informal communication methods with teachers and school staff (Calderon et al., 2011). Many of these organizational, instructional, and collaborative strategies are also considered high leverage practices in special education (McCleskey et al., 2017).

Instructing Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities who are English Learners

In the view of Ortiz and Robertson (2018), special education teachers who work with ELs must possess numerous competencies in order to meet students' language- and/or disability-related learning needs. Many of these competencies correspond to effective strategies for ELs in general education and the high-leverage practices for students in special education. It is clear that teachers of students with SCD-EL must be able to implement both EL and special-education strategies to help their students achieve, yet little is known about what teachers are presently doing in classrooms and what works best.

Many educators of students with SCD-EL are not equipped with the resources, skills, knowledge, or administrative support they need to teach these students (Mueller, Singer, &

Carranza, 2006), and little research exists to provide teachers with evidence-based resources from which to draw (Liu, Thurlow, & Quenemoen, 2015). Christensen and Mitchell (2018) found that teachers of students with SCD-EL often use drills and repetition, graphic organizers, and picture cards during instruction. However, teachers reported limited professional development opportunities for meeting the needs of these students. Following an exhaustive search of the literature, Liu et al. (2015) found only eight studies at the time that examined English language arts strategies for students with SCD-EL and none that provided definitive conclusions on the overall effectiveness of instructional strategies.

Moreover, students with SCD-EL are more likely to be served primarily through special education and may not receive language-related services as part of routine instruction (Gholson, 2018; Kangas, 2018). As Thurlow et al., (2016) states, "…the heart of the problem is identifying whether the student has a language acquisition issue due to a disability, and whether the disability is significant; without the student's proficiency in English language, how do we know?" (p. 19). Due to this ambiguity, some students with significant cognitive disabilities and limited communication skills may not be included in the typical language identification process, and as a result, may not receive or be retained in English language development services (Liu et al., 2015), despite their eligibility for language services under federal policy (Kangas, 2018). Between a lack of resources for teachers of students with SCD-EL and a porous system, many of these students may not be receiving the services they need in order to access grade-level standards.

In light of these challenges, it is essential that we improve our understanding of the instruction and assessment needs of students with SCD-EL to ensure they are college, career, and community ready. The current study was designed to answer the following research questions:

- How do teachers describe the disability and language-related needs of their students with SCD-EL?

- How do teachers approach instruction and assessment for students with SCD-EL?

- How are accessibility supports for instruction or assessment used for students with SCD-EL?

- How do teachers communicate with parents of students with SCD-EL about approaches to instruction or assessment?

Methods

Data were collected for students and teachers participating in the Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) Alternate Assessment, an 18-state consortium administering large-scale achievement assessments in English language arts, mathematics, and science. Assessments are administered annually to approximately 90,000 students with the most significant cognitive disabilities for statewide accountability purposes.

Participants

Teachers were recruited from states participating in the DLM Consortium during the spring 2018 administration. Recognizing the challenges of identifying students with SCD-EL (Karvonen & Clark, in press), two methods were used to identify teachers of likely students with SCD-EL: teacher surveys and assessment enrollment records. The goal was to cast the widest net possible rather than risk underidentification of teachers who may have these students in their caseloads.

Students were identified from teacher responses on the First Contact survey (Nash, Clark, & Karvonen, 2016), which collects information about learner characteristics, including primary language. The three primary language items included (a) Is English the student's primary

language?, (b) Is English the primary language spoken in the student's home?, and (c) Is English the primary language used for the student's instruction?

In addition, students were identified from annual enrollment data for DLM assessments, which includes a required language-related field that describes the funding source English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)/Bilingual Program or language-related services for which the student is eligible or participates. Response options include (a) Title III funded, (b) state ESOL/bilingual funded, (c) both Title III and state ESOL/bilingual funded, (d) monitored ESOL student, (e) eligible for ESOL program based on an English language proficiency test but not currently receiving ESOL program services, and (f) receives ESOL services and not funded with Title III and/or state ESOL funding.

Teachers were eligible for this study if one or more of their students in 2017-18 met either criterion for being identified as a likely student with SCD-EL: (a) the teacher indicated a language other than English for any of the First Contact survey primary language items. or (b) enrollment data indicated the student was eligible for or receives EL services. Within this group, teachers of any of the three tested DLM subjects and at any grade level were eligible for participation in the interviews. We purposefully recruited and selected teachers with the goal of maximum variation based on state, teaching settings, and teacher background/demographics. Within the sampling frame, we selected teachers who were likely to be information-rich cases: those with more than one student in the target population. We believed teachers with more than one student with SCD-EL may have more extensive experience with the topic and more students on which to base their responses.

From the master list of teachers of likely students with SCD-EL, a subset of 113 individuals were invited via email to participate in one-hour phone interviews during April and

May 2018. Teachers were offered $50 compensation for their participation. Twenty teachers expressed an interest in participating in interviews. Ten teachers (four male and six female) from six states participated in the study, reflecting an attrition rate of 50%. The teachers had a range of experience working with the target population in a variety of instructional settings. For instance, one teacher taught in a bilingual special education program in a school where the majority of the student population took the alternate assessment. Other teachers taught in monolingual, self-contained special education classrooms. On average, these teachers currently worked with four students identified as likely SCD-EL, with a range from one to nine students. Across the teacher sample, their caseloads included 46 students in grades 3-11 who were were identified as likely SCD-EL. Fourteen of the 46 were female students. Among the 28 students for whom specific primary disability information was available, 12 had an intellectual disability and 11 had autism. Deaf/blindness, specific learning disability, multiple disabilities, and other health impairments comprised the remainder of disability representation in teachers' caseloads of students with SCD-EL. Information about the students' first language was only available for eight students. Of these, seven spoke Spanish and one spoke Swahili. During the interviews, two teachers also described working with students who speak Karen.

Procedures

An interview protocol was developed in advance and included questions about teacher background information and approaches to instruction and assessment. At the beginning of each phone interview, the interviewer reviewed informed consent information and indicated the interview would be recorded. Interviews followed a semi-structured format that included questions from the interview protocol and allowed for probing as additional topic areas emerged

in the interviews. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by an external transcriber for subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

The research group used an inductive analytic approach to identify and define codes and refine the coding scheme as needed to represent the contents of the interviews. An initial set of codes and code definitions was developed based on anticipated categories and ideas that might be associated with each research question, based on the available research literature. The researchers applied the codes to two interviews at a time and refined the coding scheme based on concepts that emerged during the interviews. No further changes were needed after 6 interviews were coded. The final coding protocol comprised of 28 codes within 4 categories. Pairs of researchers re-coded earlier transcripts with the final list of codes. Two researchers reconciled any coding discrepancies. Final codes were applied to transcripted text using Dedoose qualitative data analysis software.

Finally, we developed a vignette (Miles & Huberman, 1994) based on each transcript to illustrate how the four phenomena (research questions) related to one another for one teacher. A second researcher reviewed each vignette alongside the original transcript. We used original transcripts, code reports extracted from Dedoose, and the vignettes to write narratives describing our findings for each research question.

Findings

From the coded transcriptions and vignettes, we formed themes to describe the teachers' work with students with SCD-EL. Key findings are summarized according to research question.

Disability and Language Needs

For most of our participants, the home language survey served as the primary source of identification of EL students, which is a common screener used to identify students who may need EL support (Linquanti & Bailey, 2014). Students were not often evaluated by EL professionals. Teachers and districts were sometimes divided on the question of whether to keep students in the EL programs despite the students' low IQs. Many districts have "exited" students with significant cognitive disabilities from EL programs because, while students had not yet demonstrated proficiency in English, schools felt their language development was unrelated to the need to learn English as a second language.

Participants discussed the challenge in knowing how to decipher between what was a language- or disability-related need. One teacher stated:

> ….But a lot of those things, I kind of don't see them as being EL problems, I see them as being a symptom of their disability. Sometimes it's hard to understand, how do you separate the two? Is this a problem because you're bilingual? At home, you are hearing all one language, and here we're speaking to you in all English, or is [it] just something that comes along with being autistic, or having downs?

For students who did receive EL services at school, teachers described their goals and needs as very similar to students who were not ELs. Many mentioned that the strategies used for good teaching for students with significant cognitive disabilities (e.g., visuals, repetition, language-rich environment) were the same strategies that they used with students who are ELs. In addition, many teachers discussed language goals on their students IEP, but this did not always equate to language goals that were specific to their English language needs.

Another challenge participants discussed was not knowing what their students actually understood because their student's receptive communication in English was more developed than their expressive communication. When asked about a student's receptive and expressive communication skills, one teacher stated

> He understands, he takes it in, he processes it, but he can't always give it back to me, so I can see the look of confusion when he can't process it, where that cognitive ability comes in to play.

To circumvent this challenge, teachers often enlisted help from a bilingual paraprofessional to translate certain words or phrases for the student. Other teachers mentioned that help from a bilingual paraprofessional was one thing they wished they had in their classroom; without this resource, they said that they resort to Google translate, which is not always accurate.

Approach to Instruction and Assessment

Teachers described varying levels of EL supports from their schools or districts when planning and providing instruction. Oftentimes, when they did have a curriculum geared towards students with significant cognitive disabilities, they did not have language supports included for their students who are ELs. However, many viewed teaching students with SCD-ELs through the same lens as their students who are not ELs. They saw strategies and supports that help all of their students be successful as overlapping, thus viewed their classrooms as placements that already provided much of what students with SCD-EL need.

When approaching assessment, teachers stated that they use many of the same tools they use in instruction when possible. One teacher promoted English language acquisition by giving assessments that the class went over together so they could correct their work to 100%, "so they're given a challenge of being able to see how much they can answer and then we review it together." She did not focus so much on penalizing students for wrong answers, but instead rewarded them when they corrected their work.

Participants' approaches to instruction and assessment of students who are SCD-ELs fell among four themes: visuals, language-rich environments, technology, and other staff/students.

Visuals. Teachers stated they use many visuals across their curriculum to help provide language support. Sometimes, this helped students know what the teacher was talking about. Other times, visuals provided choices to students when selecting an answer. They labeled classroom items, used picture books, and, when verb was present that they could not convey in pictures, they acted out the action. Teachers used varying sizes of pictures or altered the number of choices based on the student's level. However, teachers stated that they already do these things their classrooms, regardless of the number of ELs they have. For example, one teacher stated,

> ... the stuff we already use in special education, like the picture supports, … the concrete explaining of new vocabulary words, the modeling of sentence structure …, is stuff that we have listed under EL supports, but it's also stuff I put in non EL gen IEPs…, because that's stuff we use across special education. I feel like they overlap a lot.

Another teacher said that her EL student noticed the labels on everything in her classroom before any of the other students, and this encouraged him to want to learn to read more words and read out loud more.

Some teachers pointed out the need to pay attention to the quality of pictures used; while some students understand line drawing, others need actual images.

Language rich environment. Teachers discussed providing a classroom environment rich in oral language support, where students were constantly fully immersed in the English language. In addition to teachers and paraprofessionals providing verbal descriptions of everything in the classroom, one teacher also had her EL students talk to each other. She stated, "One of the things we make them do is try and talk to each other. That's a real challenge, but to express themselves verbally to each other academically we try and get them to talk about whatever it is." Another teacher read aloud often in order to help her students' learning process. Teachers repeatedly emphasized the constant language happening in their classrooms to

reinforce basic vocabulary words and general language, even when students were not working on

language goals. When discussing differentiating between EL students and her other students, one

teacher stated,

> I don't know that I treat them differently because the nature of my classroom is such that
> everybody needs a lot of language instruction. So, they probably get a little bit more of
> what they need. Fortunately, I have three paraprofessionals in my classroom that help me
> with these students with such high needs, and so they can work with these students -
> talking to them, getting extra vocabulary help, and language help. But, the whole class is
> getting that sort of instruction because there is that need for all of them.

> Teachers stated that they repeated many language and academic tasks to facilitate

language acquisition for ELs. One teacher stated,

> So, when I'm teaching them, I'm giving them a lot of repetition of vocabulary. I need to
> go back to very basic words like ball, this is a ball, showing a picture of the ball, and
> focusing on English vocabulary that they don't already have.

Many teachers indicated that their students were not pulled out to work one-one with the EL

instructor or placed in an EL classroom. Teachers felt that because their classes had such a high

degree of focus on language skills as well as the support of multiple adult staff, their students'

language needs were already being met. However, one teacher in a bilingual special education

classroom divided her day by teaching a block each of English literacy and Spanish literacy.

Because her students were exposed to both languages, she believed they were able to

communicate effectively in their home setting. Her partner teacher similarly divided her days

into full English or Spanish days.

Technology. Some teachers stated that technology has helped their students access the

English language through Google Translate or other programs. In cases where the student was

not able, the teacher used online resources to help with translation or they found pictures and

videos to convey a topic. Additionally, one teacher recognized technology as a strength with one

of her students. She gave him the opportunity to do many of his assignments on the computer,

which she felt has really helped him make progress with both language and academics.

Other staff or students. Some teachers interviewed had strong support from an ESL

teacher, varying from informal consultations to shared planning times to regularly spending time

in the classroom. Some students had individual lessons with an EL teacher, but this was

infrequent across the teachers we interviewed. Additionally, teachers received translation support

from other students who are ELs with more advanced language skills, the siblings of students in

their classrooms, and other teachers or school staff. In schools with larger EL populations in

general, teachers reached out to interpreters for language support in the classroom when needed.

Accessibility Supports

For this research question, we were interested in how students interacted with DLM

alternate achievement assessments specifically. The system features a number of accessibility

supports and allowable practices, of which one is EL-specific (language translation).

Teachers generally described using consistent supports across instruction and assessment

and did not often differentiate supports for their EL versus non-EL students. Teachers described

concerns about introducing supports during computer-based assessments that the student was not

already familiar with and using during instruction. The most common accessibility supports were

to use picture supports and manipulatives, human read-aloud or computer-based spoken audio,

and to enter assessment responses for students. The following two excerpts generally capture

teacher approaches:

> [For assessments] I went through and pretty much tried to find the closest matches, based
> on accommodations and modifications I'm using in the classroom. So with her that
> meant that I would be able to read to her, that meant that I would be able to scan the
> choices for her. You know the kind of accessibility options, and, just tried to apply
> everything that I could in the classroom.

> Because of the levels of my students, a lot of the things are already at a picture level, and a manipulative level, to do the test with them. So there's not much else that really necessarily needs to be done.

Teachers made decisions about supports to use during assessments based on individual-student needs. While some teachers reported that computer-based spoken audio confused students due to its lack of inflection, others indicated that their student(s) preferred computer-based spoken audio over teacher read aloud because the student could select when to use the audio and when to read on their own. For example, students could click for spoken audio if there was a specific word or phrase they did not know in English. Others indicated that students attended better to the computer spoken audio than when they had to listen to the teacher read aloud then switch to their attention to the computer to respond. While teachers often used on-the-spot translation during instruction either through the help of a paraprofessional or by looking up specific words or pictures, none of the teachers reported using translated academic assessments or the accessibility support that would have allowed them to translate specific words on the DLM assessments.

Talking with Parents

When teachers discussed their communication with parents, themes around barriers emerged. Teachers often described language barriers, but in other cases there were ideological barriers that, in some teachers' view, prevented parents' full participation in their students' education. In addition to the barriers common to students with special needs, teachers also described barriers related to educational experiences and culture.

Teachers addressed language barriers primarily by utilizing formal translation services during IEP meetings, translating documents to be sent home, or translating over the phone. One bilingual teacher was fluent in her students' home language, and other teachers worked with bilingual paraeducators or other bilingual school staff to help facilitate communication.

Teachers used a variety of approaches to make contact and build relationships with parents. Whereas some teachers only described meeting with parents during IEP meetings, other teachers described calling, emailing, and texting parents, and one teacher even visited her students' homes. Another teacher sent surveys to parents to collect more information about their student and their goals for the student. Teachers reported difficulty in making and maintaining contact with their students' families, believing in some cases that the family's past educational experiences and their culture may have contributed to differences in communication expectations. One teacher stated,

> They tend to just kind of nod and say okay. So I'm kind of learning some cultural things as well that I didn't wish they feel this way, but I'm sensing that they see me as a person of authority, that knows more, and so they just say okay I believe you, and then they don't have any questions or anything and I don't know if they just don't know how to phrase the question, or maybe when it comes to the academic school portion they just personally don't know what to ask.

In addition to these cultural differences in relationships among teachers and parents, teachers also observed that parents of students with SCD-EL often have other priorities beyond their children's education that may affect their involvement. Speaking about one parent in particular, a teacher explained,

> ...she's just trying to deal with being able to function here in the United States with a much different life than what she's used to, and she also came from a refugee camp, so her concerns, and her priorities are food and shelter and clothing and cleanliness right now. She's not worried about whether or not her child can read and get a job someday.

Discussion

Students with SCD-EL have complex language and disability needs that teachers must address during instruction and assessment and when communicating with their parents. The present study highlights several key findings related to how teachers address students' needs and approach instruction. However, findings also indicate that teachers often do not differentiate

between their students with SCD-EL and their other students with significant cognitive

disabilities. By approaching instruction and assessment equivalently across all students, teachers

may overlook cultural differences or language needs of their students.

Most teachers in our interview sample identified their students from the home language

survey, which provides important implications for practice. Shyyan et al. (2018) note the

shortcomings of using the home language survey as the sole identification mechanism; as

students with SCD-EL progress through grades, the initial survey responses become dated.

Further, the home language survey is a tool used to identify students who should receive formal

language screening, and not a conclusive screener in and of itself. This may result in overlooking

students who do need more intensive EL services, or inappropriately designating a student as EL

based on factors other than the students' English ability. In one case, a teacher with an English-

proficient student with SCD-EL wondered,

> ...is it because they have a Hispanic last name? Because...clearly there are these students who are placed in our classroom who, yes, maybe their native language...is Spanish but they've been in a self-contained monolingual classroom for the past 3 years.

This indicates a need for a review of identification processes to ensure that students are receiving

the services they need and are entitled to.

Recent research also emphasizes that IEP plans for students with SCD-EL should include

present levels of performance in both the home language and English, a clear plan for language

development in each language, and the special education and language services provided to meet

their goals (Parker & Christensen, 2018). Findings from the interviews we conducted indicated

limited evidence that IEP goals or present levels of performance considered the student's home

language. Teachers described limited plans for language learning beyond what is provided to all

students with significant cognitive disabilities. Because students with SCD-EL may demonstrate

their knowledge and skills differently in each language, or have capacities unique to each language, it is important for educators to find ways to tap into all knowledge, skills, and understandings the student can demonstrate, regardless of the language.

While the present study intentionally prioritized conducting interviews with teachers of multiple students with SCD-EL, we recognize these teachers may not be as common in the broader field of teachers working with this population. However, their insights can provide important information for teachers who may work with this population less frequently, as well as the field as a whole. When it comes to learning how to best instruct and assess students with SCD-EL, we as a field have much to learn. The interviews conducted in this study expand what is known about instruction and assessment for these students and draw attention to their nuanced needs in the classroom. Primary among these ideas is the importance of accurately identifying and defining students in this population. However, even when appropriately identified, the duty of making appropriate instructional and assessment decisions can be a daunting task for one educator with expertise in special education and not EL.

While our research found that these students are receiving special education and related services, if we are going to be successful in teaching and assessing this population of students, states and districts need to ensure more opportunities for both second language acquisition experts and special education experts to collaborate in decision-making for students with SCD-EL. In addition, states and districts need to provide effective professional development to ensure educators of this subgroup are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to address students' learning characteristics and challenges.

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