

## **Appendix D. Q & A About Exploratory Study on the Identification of English Learners with Disabilities**

### **What is the Exploratory Study on the Identification of English Learners with Disabilities?**

Funded through Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the purpose of this study to learn more about current processes and challenges related to identifying ELs for special education services, and the strategies that schools and districts are using to overcome such challenges. The study team has reviewed recent research on identifying ELs with special needs and is now conducting case study site visits with a sample of public school districts across the U.S.

### **Why is this study important?**

The goal of this study is to better understand current procedures and practices used to identify ELs with disabilities, the challenges schools and districts face in making such identifications, and the strategies that schools and districts use in overcoming those challenges. Our purpose is not to evaluate or monitor the practices in a specific district or school. We hope that what we learn from this exploratory study will help the Department generate hypotheses regarding assessing and identifying ELs with disabilities and plan a nationally representative study of the these important issues.

### **Is participation in the study required?**

Participation is voluntary.

### **How were districts selected?**

In order to best answer the study questions, we have purposively selected six case study districts using criteria intended to ensure diversity among districts with regard to the (a) percentage of students classified as EL, (b) percentage of students with IEPs, (c) rates of special education identification, (d) history of serving EL students, (d) EL instructional models used, (e) processes for determining special education eligibility, (f) enrollment of students from multiple language groups, and (g) district urbanicity. In addition, districts are spread across states.

### **What are the benefits for participating?**

Your participation will ensure that policymakers, researchers, and educators have access to important information on procedures and practices used to identify ELs with disabilities, the challenges in making such identifications, and the strategies that are being used to overcome the challenges.

Findings from this exploratory study will be publicly available on the U.S. Department of Education's web site. Participating districts and schools also will receive copies of the study report. The names of the districts or schools visited will not be disclosed in any study report or public briefing.

### **What will the case study involve?**

Your district will be visited for four to five days by a professional, experienced pair of researchers who will conduct interviews with district and school personnel who are knowledgeable about procedures and practices for identifying ELs with disabilities. Interview respondents may include:

- District administrators (e.g., special education director, EL director, federal programs director, assessment director, student/instructional services director, or their designees)
- School administrators (e.g., principal, assistant principal, or department chair)
- District-level non-administrative personnel (e.g., psychologist, instructional specialist, and/or speech-language pathologist)
- School-level service providers (e.g., special education teacher, EL teacher, counselor, resource teacher, student support team leader, and/or general education teacher)

We may also request additional information that describes policies and programs relevant to EL students with disabilities in your district.

Our study site coordinator will work to schedule our visit at a convenient time and place for the district and schools.

### **What kinds of interview questions will be asked?**

Depending upon the respondent's role, we will ask questions to help us better understand:

- Procedures, practices, and instruments used to assess and identify ELs for special education;
- Personnel involved in identification and assessment;
- Challenges in the assessment and identification of EL students and strategies that are used to overcome those challenges;
- Patterns of special education identification; and
- Procedures and practices used to exit EL students with disabilities from language instruction educational programs.

Each interview should take no more than 90 minutes. No prior preparation is needed. Questions will focus on participants' daily work experiences.

After we return home and have had a chance to review our notes from the interviews, we may follow-up briefly with respondents to clarify our interpretation of aspects of the information provided. Follow-up may occur over email or phone, as respondents prefer.

### **Will district- and school-provided information be confidential?**

Yes. We will treat the information obtained in this study in a confidential manner, to the extent provided by law. We will not identify the names of individuals, or the schools or districts in which they work, in any reports or public briefings. Interview responses will be used to

summarize findings in an aggregate manner that does not associate responses to a specific site or individual.

### **What will be done to ensure the quality of the research?**

The research team will assume responsibilities designed to protect the participants and to ensure that the data collection activities are of the highest quality and lowest burden possible. These responsibilities include:

- Undergoing review by the Westat Institutional Review Board (IRB);
- Obtaining Office of Management and Budget clearance for the data collection. The valid OMB control number of this information collection is XXXX-XXXX; and
- Presenting the study for review by an expert technical advisory panel that includes a district EL administrator, district Special Education administrator, and several nationally-known experts in English learners with disabilities.

### **Who is conducting the study?**

The U.S. Department of Education's Policy and Program Studies Service is overseeing this study. The following research contractors are conducting the study:

- **Westat** ([www.westat.com](http://www.westat.com)) leads the study with Drs. Tamara Nimkoff (Project Director) and Elaine Carlson. Westat is an employee-owned research corporation serving agencies of the U.S. Government, as well as businesses, foundations, and state and local governments. Westat conducts research studies in education, transportation, the environment, human services, health, social services, housing, energy, military human resources, and science and technology.
- **Instructional Research Group** ([www.inresg.org](http://www.inresg.org)) is an educational research institute specializing in large-scale program evaluation field research in the areas of reading, mathematics, education of English learners, and professional development. IRG's current projects include randomized control trials evaluating the impact of teaching English learners and comparing different models of response to intervention strategies.
- **Compass Evaluation and Research** ([www.compasseval.com](http://www.compasseval.com)) is an independent evaluation-consulting firm dedicated to working jointly with organizations to conduct evaluations that contribute to the development of successful programs. Compass has worked in the areas of early childhood; K-12 educational programs; special education; health, community, and safety; and evaluation capacity building.

### **For more information, please contact:**

- Westat Project Director: Tamara Nimkoff, (919) 474-0719 or [tamaranimkoff@westat.com](mailto:tamaranimkoff@westat.com)  
U.S. Department of Education Project Officer for the study: Jean Yan, (202) 205-6212 or [Jean.Yan@ed.gov](mailto:Jean.Yan@ed.gov).