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SD/LEP Inclusions/Exclusions in NAEP: An Investigation of Factors Affecting SD/LEP Inclusions/Exclusions in NAEP

Final Report

January 2007

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as "the Nation's Report Card," is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of students in the United States. Assessments have been conducted periodically since 1969 in a variety of subjects, including mathematics and reading. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a division of the U.S. Department of Education, is responsible for administering NAEP. The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), an independent, bipartisan group, is responsible for setting NAEP policy as well as developing the framework and test specifications for the NAEP assessments.[1]

Since 1990, NAEP has provided assessment results for participating states as well as for the nation. State participation was initially voluntary, but under the No Child Left Behind Act, participation is now required of states receiving Title I funds. Compared with national NAEP results, state results have more stakeholders and therefore tend to generate greater interest. The audience for NAEP data is particularly interested in states' progress over time, as well as in comparisons across states at a given point in time. Additionally, states are interested in comparing their progress on NAEP with their progress as measured on their own state assessments. It is important for NAEP to aggressively investigate any factors that can potentially obscure or bias these comparisons.

One area of concern is the observed variation in the percentage of students excluded from testing due to their disability (SD) or English language learner (ELL) status. Because SD and ELL students tend to perform near the bottom of the achievement distribution, significant fluctuations in their participation can influence state scores disproportionately. Moreover, these variations have occurred despite NAEP's efforts to standardize the inclusion and accommodation decision process. The motivation for the present study was to obtain more systematic information about how decisions are made at the local school level so as to better understand the causes of the observed variation and to suggest modifications in NAEP procedures that could reduce variation.

NAEP Inclusion Decision Procedures

The present study was carried out in conjunction with the 2005 administration of NAEP. At that time, many features of the inclusion decision process had been in place for a number of years. Importantly, local school staff remained responsible for making the inclusion decisions based on written criteria provided by NAEP. Inclusion was encouraged, and—as had been true from 2002 forward—a number of accommodations were available to make the NAEP assessment accessible to greater numbers of students. New in 2005 was a decision tree designed to direct the decision-maker to relevant

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[1] http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/about/

questions on the SD/ELL questionnaire (completed for all identified SD or ELL students) and to lead the decision-maker to an appropriate inclusion/exclusion decision based on the responses to these questions. In addition, the field staff from Westat, the contractor for sampling and administration, was encouraged to work actively with local school staff to apply the decision tree and review decisions for each SD and ELL child in the sample.

Study Questions

This study focuses on three primary research questions:

(1) Who are the school personnel who make SD and ELL inclusion/exclusion decisions?

(2) How do school designees decide to include (with or without accommodations) or exclude SD and ELL students in NAEP? What sources of information do they use in making these decisions?

(3) What NAEP documents do school designees use when they make NAEP inclusion/exclusion decisions? What role does the Westat administrator play in the decision-making process?

Methodology

In order to address these research questions, in spring 2005, AIR staff conducted phone interviews with school personnel who were knowledgeable about how decisions regarding inclusion and accommodation were made for SD and ELL students in the 2005 NAEP. (These individuals are hereafter referred to as "school designees.") Our research activities, including instrument development, sample selection, data collection, and data coding and analysis are described below.

Instrument Development. After conducting exploratory interviews with staff from four schools that participated in the 2004 NAEP, AIR drafted protocols for interviews with school designees. AIR then revised the interview protocols based on feedback received from ETS and NCES. The interview protocol addressed the following topics:

- school designee's position and responsibilities;
- school designee's involvement in the 2005 NAEP as well as previous NAEP assessments;
- how the school designee and other personnel decided whether or not to include and accommodate up to four specific SD and/or ELL students who were sampled from the school's completed administration schedule;

- use of various NAEP documents, including the SD/ELL questionnaires, the decision trees, and the list of NAEP criteria;
- level of difficulty associated with deciding whether or not to include and accommodate the sampled SD and/or ELL students;
- guidance received from Westat staff coordinating the NAEP administration at the school;
- and comparisons between inclusion/exclusion decisions for the NAEP assessment and other assessments at the schools.

AIR conducted an Institutional Review Board (IRB) review of the interview protocol. To comply with IRB requirements and protect study participants, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The protocol included an introductory script describing the purpose of the study, a guarantee of anonymity in the reporting of information obtained through the interviews, and the right of the interviewee to skip any questions they choose not to answer or to terminate the interview at any time. AIR also submitted a clearance request to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and received clearance from OMB to conduct the interviews. The complete interview protocol is included as an appendix to this report.

Sample Selection. In order to include a variety of school contexts in the study, the interviews were conducted in seven states and the District of Columbia. Alaska, Arizona, California, and New Mexico were selected because they had both the highest percentages of SD and ELL students and the highest inclusion rates for SD and ELL students in the 2003 NAEP. Delaware, South Carolina, Texas, and the District of Columbia were chosen from among several jurisdictions with exclusion rates higher than the national average. Within the eight jurisdictions selected for the study, completed 2005 administration records were obtained for all participating schools and used in the school sampling process. Eligible schools were identified as schools with at least four SD and/or ELL students in their 2005 NAEP sample and not already sampled for another NAEP study.[2] Twelve grade 4 schools and 12 grade 8 schools were randomly sampled from among the eligible schools in each jurisdiction. This sample of 192 schools was twice as large as the number of interviews we hoped to complete and was intended to provide alternatives in cases where school personnel refused to participate in the study or could not be contacted.

Data Collection. Data collection for the NAEP Inclusion/Exclusion Study began in mid-April and continued through early June 2005. AIR sent a letter from NCES and blank reference copies of the 2005 NAEP Inclusion documents (NAEP SD and ELL Inclusion booklets and SD and ELL questionnaires) to the NAEP school coordinators at each of the

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[2] Schools that participated in the 2005 NAEP that were sampled for other NAEP studies (e.g., Westat follow-up interviews, NAEP Indian Study, NAEP Inclusion/Exclusion Study in Trial Urban Districts) were excluded from this NAEP Inclusion/Exclusion Study sample in order to reduce the burden on participating schools.

192 sampled schools.[3] The letter outlined the purpose of the study and encouraged schools to participate. AIR staff then called and e-mailed each NAEP school coordinator to identify the primary school designee (the person most knowledgeable about how inclusion and accommodation decisions for NAEP were made at that school). In most cases, the primary school designee was determined to be the same as the NAEP school coordinator.

Once the primary school designee was identified, AIR staff invited that individual to participate in the study and scheduled a phone interview. If, after interviewing the primary school designee, it was determined that additional interviews with other school personnel (secondary school designees) were needed to complete the information required by the interview protocol, AIR staff asked for contact information and attempted to schedule follow-up interviews. At the end of data collection, participating schools at which at least one school designee completed an interview were sent a thank you letter and a $50 incentive for their school.

Among the 192 schools that were contacted and invited to participate in the study, interviews were ultimately completed with 77 schools, including 44 schools at grade 4 and 33 at grade 8. This was somewhat short of the 96 schools that we had hoped to include in the study. Personnel from 34 schools refused to participate in the study, and we were unable to contact or schedule interviews with personnel from 83 schools prior to the end of the school year.[4] Table 1 displays the distribution of the final school sample by jurisdiction and grade level.

Table 1: Number of schools, by jurisdiction and grade

	AK	AZ	CA	DC	DE	NM	SC	TX	TOTAL
Grade 4	5	6	5	5	4	5	6	8	**44**
Grade 8	7	3	2	4	5	4	7	1	**33**
Total	**12**	**9**	**7**	**9**	**9**	**9**	**13**	**9**	**77**

Once a primary school designee at a sampled school agreed to participate in the study, AIR staff selected a sample of four students from that school, based on administration schedule records. For purposes of the interview, we identified these students by administration schedule line number. Respondents were instructed to consult the school copy of the administration schedule, which included student names.

When possible, we selected one included SD, one excluded SD, one included ELL student, and one excluded ELL student for discussion. Across schools, our selections

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[3] Here and below, schools that were sampled for both grade 4 and grade 8 are counted separately at each grade level.

[4] Delays in receiving OMB clearance pushed the data collection further back into the spring and impacted the number of schools that could be contacted successfully before the end of the school year.

were also designed to include some SD and ELL students who were provided with accommodations for NAEP, as well as some SD and ELL students who participated in NAEP without any accommodations.

At six participating schools, the school designees were unable to provide student-specific information, often because they had misplaced their copy of the administration schedule. These respondents provided general information on how they decided whether or not to include and accommodate students in the 2005 NAEP. School personnel at the remaining 71 schools provided information on inclusion/exclusion decisions for up to 4 students. (For some interviews we discussed fewer than 4 students due to time constraints and other factors.) The final sample included data for 251 students, distributed as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Number of students with completed interview data, by type of student and jurisdiction

	SD		ELL		SD & ELL		
Jurisdiction	Included	Excluded	Included	Excluded	Included	Excluded	**Total**
Alaska	13	4	14	1	4	0	**36**
Arizona	11	6	10	2	1	4	**34**
California	6	4	5	0	1	2	**18**
Washington, D.C.	14	12	3	2	0	1	**32**
Delaware	9	7	1	2	0	1	**20**
New Mexico	17	3	7	1	2	1	**31**
South Carolina	17	17	9	3	0	0	**46**
Texas	13	5	10	3	1	2	**34**
Total	**100**	**58**	**59**	**14**	**9**	**11**	**251**

The distribution of students by assessment subject area is shown in table 3.

Table 3. Number of students with completed interview data, by subject and grade

	Mathematics	**Reading**	**Science**	**Total**
Grade 4	48	35	18	**101**
Grade 8	57	53	40	**150**
Total	**105**	**88**	**58**	**251**

Data Coding and Analysis. Notes from the NAEP Inclusion/Exclusion telephone interviews were coded by state, school, respondent, student identification number, student category (SD, ELL, or SD and ELL), inclusion status (included or excluded), accommodation status (accommodation or no accommodation), and question number. AIR staff conducted an initial review to identify "emerging themes" and coded the qualitative responses by these themes. The themes were revised throughout the coding

process as necessary. Data were then analyzed in relation to the study's three main research questions. In addition, for those students sampled for the Mathematics or Reading assessments (83 eighth-grade students and 110 fourth-grade students), we included selected SD/ELL questionnaire data in our analysis.[5]

Findings

In this section, we discuss the results from the interviews as they relate to the three study questions. This is followed by discussion of selected findings from the SD and ELL questionnaires.

Who are the school personnel who make SD and ELL inclusion/ exclusion decisions?

AIR conducted 75 interviews with primary school designees, that is, individuals who had been identified by their NAEP school coordinators as most knowledgeable about how decisions were made to include and accommodate SD and ELL students in the 2005 NAEP administration.[6] All of these primary school designees indicated that they were involved in some capacity with other assessments at their schools (such as state and local testing), and two-thirds listed "test coordinator" for their school among their various job responsibilities. Several indicated that they also had specific responsibilities with respect to SD and ELL students at their school, including overseeing special programs such as ESL and special education, participating in IEP meetings, and acting as the ESL representative.

The majority of primary school designees were also responsible for overall NAEP coordination at their schools, and many indicated that they became involved with the 2005 NAEP administration because it fell under their responsibilities as testing coordinator for their schools. Other primary school designees indicated that they were assigned by their principal to coordinate NAEP administration at their schools because of their knowledge of SD and ELL student needs. Several principals indicated that coordinating NAEP at their schools fell under their responsibilities as principal.

Of the 75 primary school designees, 33 identified themselves as school counselors, 24 were principals or assistant principals, and 18 held other positions within the school such as resource teacher, regular education teacher, education diagnostician, or instructional facilitator/coordinator. AIR staff also conducted follow-up interviews with 21 other staff members (secondary school designees) who, according to the primary

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[5] At the time of this report, 2005 NAEP data were unavailable for the 58 students in our study who had been sampled for the science assessment.

[6] There were only 75 primary school designees because 2 of the 77 schools in the study were sampled for both grades 4 and 8. In each of these schools, a single primary school designee was responsible for both grade levels.

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school designees, helped decide whether or not to include and accommodate specific SD and ELL students in NAEP. The secondary school designees included 11 special education teachers/coordinators, 5 regular education teachers, 3 ELL teachers/specialists, and 3 respondents with other job titles.

How do school designees decide to include (with or without accommodations) or exclude SD and ELL students in NAEP? What sources of information do they use in making these decisions?

As noted in the previous section, most schools in our sample had assigned responsibility for NAEP inclusion and accommodation decisions to someone who was generally involved in test coordination for the school and who was also serving as the official school coordinator for NAEP. These primary school designees reported relying on other staff members to varying degrees.

Involving Others in the Decision Process. Collaboration could take the form of group or team meetings, with respondents reporting that inclusion and accommodation decisions about individual students were made in the context of a group or team meeting almost one-third of the time. For example, one respondent, who functioned as the school's overall test coordinator, reported that she sat down with a committee and went through the NAEP decision tree for each student. In addition to the respondent, the committee consisted of the assistant testing coordinator, the school counselor, the teacher who serves as the Language Proficiency Assessment Committee representative, and the special education team leader.

The use of group or team meetings were reported with the same frequency for both SD and ELL students, reflecting the fact that individual schools tended to either use this procedure for all eligible students or for none. Based on our samples, however, the use of team meetings for decision-making appeared to vary by jurisdiction and to be more frequent in some of the jurisdictions that had the highest NAEP inclusion rates in 2003. (Alaskan respondents reported using team meetings to make decisions for 47 percent of students in the sample, while Arizona reported using them for 56 percent.) By contrast, the use of group or team meetings appeared less frequently in some of the jurisdictions that had the lowest NAEP inclusion rates in 2003. (Delaware reported using team meetings for only 15 percent of the students in the sample, while South Carolina reported using them for 13 percent.)

Table 4: Percent of students for whom group or team meetings were held to consider inclusion and accommodation decisions, by jurisdiction

Overall	AK	AZ	CA	DC	DE	NM	SC	TX
31%	47%	56%	28%	31%	15%	32%	13%	21%

Whether or not there were formal team meetings, teacher recommendations were frequently cited as influencing the inclusion and accommodation decisions. Respondents reported considering teacher recommendations in making inclusion and accommodation decisions for 56 percent of students, including 71 percent of ELL students and 49 percent of SD students. The somewhat lower frequency for SD students probably reflects the fact that the presence of the IEP can make decisions for these students more straightforward. With regard to geographic variation, the propensity to use teacher recommendations did not appear associated with the jurisdictions' 2003 NAEP inclusion rates.

Table 5: Percent of students for whom teacher recommendations were solicited to inform inclusion and accommodation decisions, by jurisdiction

Overall	AK	AZ	CA	DC	DE	NM	SC	TX
56%	53%	68%	44%	72%	65%	39%	59%	44%

Failure to engage others in the decision process is not necessarily an indication that the decisions were less informed. For example, one respondent reported that since she knew the student well (and it was obvious that the student was too low-functioning to participate) she simply used the students' IEP and her own knowledge to complete the SD questionnaire and render a decision to exclude without having to further burden the special education teacher.

There were, however, a few schools in which the respondents reported that they did not think they were responsible for making inclusion decisions because these decisions had been made already by the district. This seemed to apply primarily in the case of ELL students. One respondent said that it was his understanding that the district had decided that the whole grade 4 class should take NAEP (although he did give the ELL questionnaires to the classroom teacher and asked the teacher to let him know if she had concerns about testing any of the students on the NAEP list). Another respondent in a different jurisdiction reported that the district's Language Minority Office assesses the ELL students and assigns a level of proficiency. All ELL students at a given proficiency level get the same accommodations for all testing.

Use of Paper Documents. Paper documents that were used frequently in the decision process included IEP or 504 plans for SD students and language records for ELL students. Not surprisingly, IEP or 504 plans were mentioned in reference to decision-

making for the vast majority of SD students in the sample, and it seems likely that they were actually used, implicitly or explicitly, for all SD students. Many respondents stressed the legally binding nature of the IEP and the necessity of following its prescription. A typical comment from one respondent was that she talked with the student's teachers and decided that testing the student without the IEP-designated accommodations would constitute a violation of the student's rights.

Table 6: Percent of SD and SD/ELL students for whom school designees reported using IEP or 504 Plan in decision-making, by type of student

Student type	IEP or 504 records
SD (N=158)	84%
SD and ELL (N=20)	80%
Total (N=178)	84%

An interesting side note to the perceived binding nature of the IEP was that a few schools reported offering accommodations preferentially to SD students, rather than ELL students, because the SD students had to receive the accommodations by law. One respondent, for example, said she had neither enough space nor enough administrators to provide as many small group accommodations as were recommended. She felt IEPs obligated her to provide for SD students first.[7]

On the ELL side, the most frequently cited paper document was a formal language record (presumably a test score or proficiency level on a state or district test of English fluency). Respondents reported consulting these documents for over 20 percent of ELL students in the sample. This may be a low estimate of the extent to which such records were actually used since the interview protocol did not specifically probe on this point, and the language records may have been subsumed under a more general response of "student records" in some cases. Based on the distribution of responses across jurisdictions, it appears that formal language records are in use in at least some districts within most of the jurisdictions that we sampled. Only in Alaska and in New Mexico were there no respondents who mentioned making use of formal language records.

Table 7: Percent of ELL and SD/ELL students for whom school designees reported using language records in decision-making, by type of student

Student type	Language records
ELL (N=73)	23%
SD and ELL (N=20)	20%
Total (N=93)	23%

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[7] This response is somewhat confusing since the provision of test administrators should have been a Westat responsibility.

Table 8: Percent of ELL and SD/ELL students for whom school designees reported using language records in decision-making, by jurisdiction and type of student

Student type	AK	AZ	CA	DC	DE	NM	SC	TX
ELL (N=73)	0%	33%	60%	40%	33%	0%	33%	23%
SD and ELL (N=20)	0%	20%	33%	100%	100%	0%	0%	0%

Reference to State Assessments. While 28 of the 75 primary school designees indicated that the process of deciding whether or not to include and accommodate SD and ELL students in NAEP was very similar to the decision process for their state assessments, another 28 respondents indicated that decisions had to be modified for NAEP because NAEP offers fewer accommodations than their state assessment. Another six respondents mentioned that they are not allowed to exclude students from their state assessments except in very extreme cases, whereas they are allowed to exclude students from NAEP.

Overall, respondents reported consulting state assessment records for 22 percent of students when deciding on inclusion and accommodations for NAEP. State assessment records were used more frequently for ELL students than for SD students.

Table 9: Percent of students for whom school designees reported using state assessment records in decision-making, by type of student

Student type	State assessment records
SD (N=158)	17%
ELL (N=73)	33%
SD and ELL (N=20)	30%
Total (N=251)	22%

Impact of Availability of Accommodations. There was a clear relationship between inclusion decisions and the availability of the student's usual accommodations. This was particularly true for SD students due to the aforementioned deference to the IEP as a legally binding document. At least two respondents stated that all students with disabilities at their schools who were sampled from NAEP were excluded from the assessment because their accommodations were not offered on NAEP.

On the ELL side, there appeared to be somewhat more room for flexibility. For example, one respondent remarked that the advice from the student's classroom teacher was that the student would "work better" in a small group or with extended time. The respondent went on to say that she assigned the child to extended time because she already had 5 or 6 students requiring a small group administration. (This was another example of a respondent who appeared to perceive a limitation on the resources available for small group testing.)

The accommodations that were cited as unavailable, and that therefore kept the student from participating in NAEP, were in line with previous reports on this topic. Off-grade level assessment and reading the reading assessment aloud were cited most frequently. One interesting side note was that, for students who were not tested because they typically receive out-of-level testing, there appeared to be ambiguity as to whether to code this as "cannot be assessed" or "required accommodation not offered" on the administration schedule. Since out-of-level testing is not technically classified as an accommodation, it would be appropriate to provide more explicit guidance as to how to code this circumstance.

Identification of English Language Learners. Another factor which may affect inclusion rates is how students are identified as SD and ELL. While the process for identifying students as having a disability is relatively uniform under the IEP process, we saw some variation among participating schools in the process of identifying students as English language learners. As noted earlier, standardized language tests such as the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), Language Assessment Scales (LAS) and the Idea Proficiency Test (IPT) are being used in a number of jurisdictions to evaluate students' ELL status. And in most states ELL status is restricted to students with a current deficit in English proficiency, whether or not measured on a standardized test. We encountered a different use of the ELL designation, however, in some of the Alaska schools in our sample. For example, at one Alaskan school, all students in the school were identified as ELL because they spoke a tribal language in addition to English, despite at least some of the students being proficient in English. At another school in Alaska, students were identified as ELL if they spoke a language other than English, if a language other than English was spoken in their homes, *or* if their parents spoke a language other than English. These alternative definitions of ELL did not impact the students' likelihood of being included in NAEP because all of the students were included based on the school designee's assessment of the student's own language competency. However, it did affect the apparent inclusion *rate*, since many more linguistically competent students were included in the ELL designation.

What NAEP documents do school designees use when they make NAEP inclusion/exclusion decisions? What role does the Westat administrator play in the decision-making process?

In 2005, NAEP provided a series of resources to guide the school designee in making inclusion and accommodations decisions. Our interview protocol explicitly probed respondents about their use of these documents in the decision process. We also explored the timing of the inclusion and accommodation decisions relative to the Westat administrator's school visit, and considered the role of the Westat administrator in facilitating the decision process.

SD/ELL Questionnaires. For a number of years, NAEP has required that an SD or ELL questionnaire be completed for each child so designated who appears in the NAEP sample. The questionnaire is intended to be completed by someone familiar with the child's capabilities, curriculum, and state testing history. At the time of this report, data concerning the SD/ELL questionnaire were available for the 193 students (out of our total sample of 251) who were in the reading or mathematics assessments.[8] Based on these data, it appears that the rate of questionnaire completion was very high in 2005. SD questionnaires were received for 96 percent of students in our sample for whom they should have been completed (SD and SD/ELL students), and ELL questionnaires were received for 97 percent of students for whom they should have been completed (ELL and SD/ELL students).

Because the questionnaires are typically filled out by teachers familiar with the individual students, while overall responsibility for decisions about inclusion and accommodations often rests with a single individual who may not know each student well, the NAEP program encourages the active use of these questionnaires in decision-making. In fact, respondents reported using the SD or ELL questionnaires in decision-making for 55 percent of students, including 54 percent of SD students, 60 percent of ELL students, and 50 percent of SD/ELL students.

The use of the questionnaires in decision-making appears to have been more frequent in those jurisdictions that we sampled because they had the highest inclusion rates in 2003 (Alaska, Arizona, California, and New Mexico) compared with the jurisdictions that we sampled because they had the lowest inclusion rates in 2003 (District of Columbia, Delaware, South Carolina, and Texas).

Table 10: Percent of students for whom school designees reported using SD/ELL questionnaires to inform inclusion and accommodation decisions, by jurisdiction

Overall	AK	AZ	CA	DC	DE	NM	SC	TX
55%	72%	62%	78%	28%	55%	58%	50%	53%

Of course, questionnaire review is not the only mechanism by which information can flow between members of the school staff. In fact, when reported questionnaire use is cross-tabulated with reported use of group or team meetings for decision-making, we find that the two practices overlap only partially.

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[8] Data from the science assessment were not available at the time of this report.

Table 11: Percent of students for whom school designees reported using group or team meetings and/or SD/ELL questionnaires to inform inclusion and accommodation decisions

	Group or team meeting	
Use of SD or ELL Questionnaire	**Yes**	**No**
Yes	17%	41%
No	15%	27%

SD/ELL Brochures. In addition to the questionnaires, schools were given separate SD and ELL brochures that provided additional tools for making inclusion and accommodations decisions. The four-page brochures included three separate tools: the NAEP criteria for inclusion; a list of frequently provided accommodations, notated to indicate which were allowed by NAEP; and a decision tree to guide the actual decision process. In our interviews, we questioned respondents about their use of each of these tools.

In general, respondents reported less use of any of these tools than of the SD/ELL questionnaires, and at least three respondents claimed that they had never seen the SD/ELL brochures before. The decision tree was reported used least frequently of all (for only 24 percent of students). Moreover, there were more instances (10 percent of cases) in which the respondent could not remember whether or not the decision tree was used.[9]

Table 12: Percent of students for whom school designees reported using various NAEP inclusion documents, by student type

Student Type	NAEP Criteria	List of Frequently Provided Accommodations	NAEP Decision Tree
SD (N=158)	42%	45%	25%
ELL (N=73)	40%	26%	19%
SD and ELL (N=20)	35%	50%	25%
Total (N=251)	41%	40%	24%

Some respondents did report appreciating the availability of the decision tree. Typical comments from these respondents were "The decisions were very easy. Following the decision tree made it easy," and "I just followed the flow chart for the children: 'Could the student participate without the accommodations not permitted by NAEP?' No."

Other respondents, however, seemed to find the decision tree superfluous. For example, one respondent said, "I didn't use the decision tree. I glanced at it, but really I went directly to the people who were involved with identifying these students to see if

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[9] Cases in which the respondent could not recall use were included in the "not used" totals here and elsewhere in the report.

anyone qualified for accommodations under standardized testing; The answer was 'no.'" Another respondent said: "I didn't really use the decision tree. I knew the student really well, and I knew that the only accommodation he would need was extended time."

Overall, respondents reported that the decision-making was easy or very easy for most (84 percent) of the cases they had to consider.

Role of Westat Staff. In addition to the SD/ELL brochure, a second innovation in 2005 was a requirement for Westat staff to review inclusion and accommodation decisions more explicitly with school designees, referencing the decision tree and other decision tools as required. The intention was for the SD/ELL questionnaires to be completed prior to the Westat administrator's visit so that inclusion and accommodation decisions could be made at the time of the visit, if not prior. If the decisions had been made prior, the Westat administrator was expected to review the decisions with the school designee. In general this process appears to have happened as planned. Almost half of the respondents reported making some or all of their inclusion and accommodations decisions during the Westat visit, while an equivalent number reported making all of their decisions in advance. Where decisions were spread across the two time periods, it was generally the case that the easier decisions were made in advance and the more problematic decisions were held for discussion with the Westat administrator.

Table 13. Percent of school designees, by timing of inclusion and accommodation decisions

Timing of decisions	
Prior to Westat visit	48%
During Westat visit	25%
Some prior and some during	23%
After Westat visit	4%

Note: Data based on the 73 primary school designees who answered this question.

The following are some typical quotations regarding the assistance provided by the Westat administrator:

> *The NAEP representative offered guidance in going over the documents and verbally told us what we needed to do because [the] whole packet was a lot to take in. After we made the decisions (mostly in team meetings) we went through each student with NAEP to verify, but no changes were made.*

> *We had this nailed before the NAEP representative came and sat down. He walked us through the paperwork and had small tweaks on some of the forms, but nothing on the inclusion or accommodation decisions.*

I and the other teachers had an idea based on the questionnaires for each student, but also when I met with the NAEP person, she knew better which accommodations could be done and not done. So I pretty much knew what the student needed, but the NAEP person helped figure out which accommodation, if applicable, was best.

The NAEP representative helped clarify some of the guidelines for testing and length of sessions, which helped me make the decision for some of difficult choices. The exclusion of the one student was decided during the visit, but other decisions were made before.

There was even one respondent who reported being hospitalized with a stroke during the period when the school was preparing for NAEP. She indicated that the Westat administrator was very helpful, calling her while she was in the hospital (apparently at her request) to discuss the students and how to determine whether or not they should be included, and then finalizing the decisions with her during the school visit.

By contrast, there was one respondent who reported being instructed to simply hand over the SD/ELL questionnaires to the NAEP representative, who then made all inclusion and accommodation decisions and informed the school of the outcomes. It is, of course, difficult to know the circumstances that led to this outcome, and the respondent certainly did not appear to have been bothered by having these decisions made for her.

Selected findings from SD/LEP questionnaires

As described earlier, SD or ELL questionnaires were available, as of the date of this report, for nearly all of the 193 students in the sample who had been assessed in reading or mathematics.

SD Questionnaires. In nearly 70 percent of the cases, the SD questionnaires had been filled out by the students' special education teachers. The next most common category of SD questionnaire respondent was the general education classroom teacher; 19 percent of the SD questionnaires were completed by general education classroom teachers, but these were primarily for grade 4 students.

The SD questionnaire included a record of how the student participated in his or her state assessment. As can be seen in table 14, among the 20 students who were reported to have participated in their state assessments without accommodations, only one was excluded from NAEP. Among the 80 that had participated in their state assessment with accommodations, 35 students (44 percent) were excluded, including 29 who had taken their state assessments with accommodations not allowed by NAEP, such as a read-aloud accommodation on the reading test. Exclusion rates were much higher for

students who were reported to have had out-of-level testing or alternate assessments in their state assessments. Thus, we see that inclusion decisions on NAEP closely follow those made for the state assessment.

Table 14: Number of SD and SD/ELL students, by participation in NAEP and by mode of participation in state assessment

	Included in NAEP	Excluded from NAEP	Total
Regular state assessment without accommodation	19	1	**20**
Regular state assessment with accommodation	45	35	**80**
Out of level testing	3	10	**13**
Alternate assessment	1	10	**11**
Total	**68**	**56**	**124**

Note: Counts based on students with non-missing data.

Another point of interest was how the judgment of the SD questionnaire respondent regarding the student's participation in NAEP aligned with the final inclusion decision. These data derive from the same SD questionnaire item that is supposed to be used as the entry point for the decision tree. As can be seen from table 15, there is only a single case in which the SD questionnaire respondent's judgment was overridden to include the student in NAEP. On the other hand, there were 16 cases in which the SD questionnaire respondent indicated that the student could participate, but the student was excluded anyway. In most of these cases, it appears that the discrepancy was caused by the questionnaire respondent's lack of familiarity with the specific accommodations allowed by NAEP. However, it is also true that the primary school designees that we interviewed only reported considering the SD questionnaires in 7 of these 16 discrepant cases.

Table 15: Number of SD and SD/ELL students, by participation in NAEP and by SD questionnaire respondent's recommendation for NAEP participation

	Included in NAEP	Excluded from NAEP	Total
Yes, without accommodations	20	1	**21**
Yes, with accommodations permitted in NAEP	55	16	**71**
No, student is significantly cognitively disabled	0	6	**6**
No, student cannot be assessed without off-grade or alternate assessment	0	23	**23**
No, student cannot demonstrate knowledge even with accommodations permitted in NAEP	1	10	**11**
Total	**76**	**56**	**132**

Note: Counts based on students with non-missing data.

There were also two cases in which the questionnaire respondent recommended that the student participate in NAEP with accommodations, but the student was assessed without accommodations.

ELL Questionnaires. In 53 percent of the cases, the ELL questionnaires had been filled out by the students' general education classroom teachers. The next most common category of ELL questionnaire respondent was the bilingual education classroom teacher, accounting for 18 percent of the ELL questionnaires.

Like the SD questionnaire, the ELL questionnaire included a record of how the student participated in his or her state assessment. As shown in table 16, among the 31 students who were reported to have participated in their state assessments without accommodations, only two were excluded from NAEP. Among the 19 that had participated in their state assessment with direct or indirect linguistic support accommodations, 11 students (58 percent) were excluded. Some, but not all of these students had received native language versions of their state assessments.

Table 16: Number of ELL and SD/ELL students, by participation in NAEP and by mode of participation in state assessment

	Included in NAEP	Excluded from NAEP	Total
Regular assessment without accommodations	29	2	31
Regular assessment with direct or indirect linguistic support accommodations	8	11	19
Total	**37**	**13**	**50**

Note: Counts based on students with non-missing data.

As we did with the SD questionnaire, we looked at how the judgment of the ELL questionnaire respondent regarding the student's participation in NAEP aligned with the final inclusion decision. The data in table 17 show that all of the ELL students for whom the questionnaire respondent recommended exclusion were ultimately excluded from NAEP; the ELL questionnaire respondent's judgment was never overridden to include the student in NAEP. On the other hand, there were eight cases in which the ELL questionnaire respondent indicated that the student could participate, but the student was excluded anyway. Interestingly, seven students in our sample who were rated by ELL questionnaire respondents as having low proficiency or no proficiency in reading English were not recommended by the questionnaire respondents for exclusion, and were included in NAEP. Three of these seven were included without accommodations; in one of these three cases, the ELL questionnaire respondent (the student's general education classroom teacher) had recommended that the student receive accommodations. The primary school designee we interviewed about this student indicated that she did not consider the ELL questionnaire in making the decision, but instead relied solely on the recommendation of the student's ESL pullout teacher.

Table 17: Number of ELL and SD/ELL students, by participation in NAEP and by ELL questionnaire respondent's recommendation for NAEP participation

	Included in NAEP	Excluded from NAEP	Total
Yes, without accommodations	26	3	**29**
Yes, with accommodations permitted in NAEP	17	5	**22**
No, student cannot demonstrate knowledge even with accommodations permitted in NAEP	0	9	**9**
Total	**43**	**17**	**60**

Note: Counts based on students with non-missing data.

There were also five cases in which the questionnaire respondent recommended that the student participate in NAEP with accommodations, but the student was assessed without accommodations.

Summary and Recommendations

In general, the results of these interviews support less formal observations that have previously been made concerning the inclusion and accommodation process. Notably:
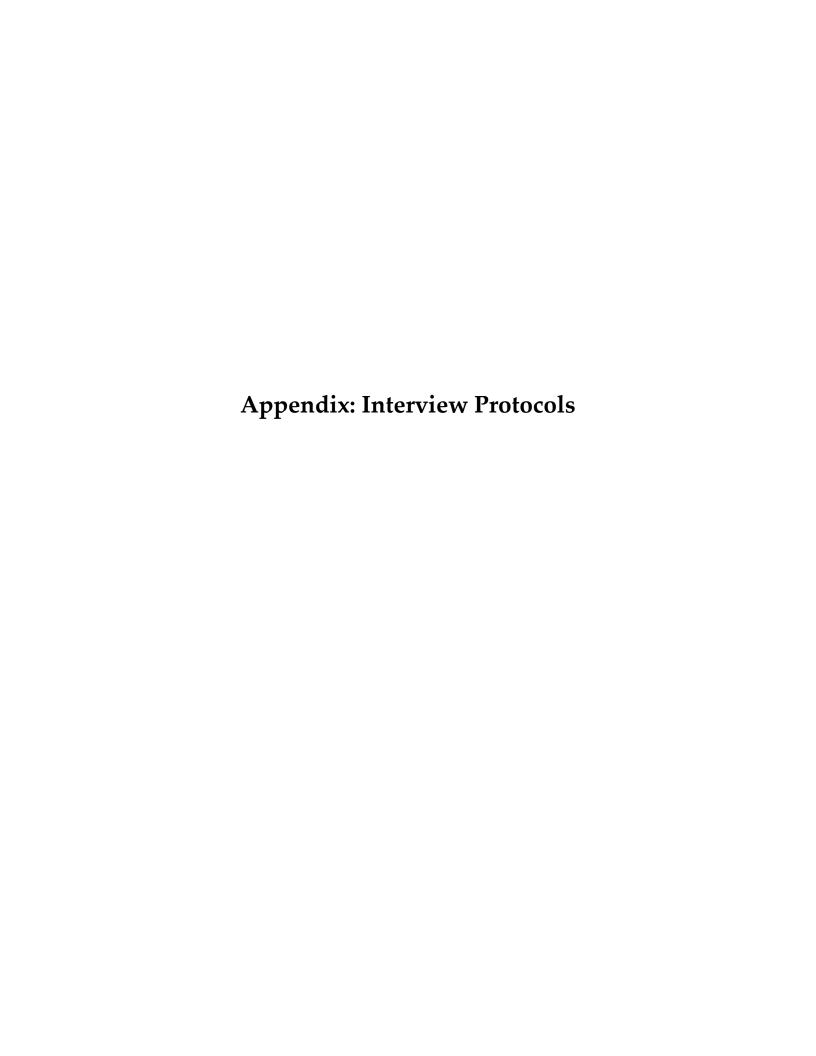
- Responsibility for local inclusion and accommodation decisions is most frequently assigned to the staff member who coordinates testing for the school, and this individual may not have detailed knowledge of the individual students for whom decisions must be made.
- There is considerable school-to-school variation in the extent to which other school personnel, who may be more familiar with individual students, are brought into the decision process.
- The specific expertise of the individual completing the SD/ELL questionnaire (who is supposed to be the person most knowledgeable about the student) may or may not be tapped, and the questionnaire itself is likely completed without a detailed understanding of NAEP requirements and NAEP accommodations.
- For SD students, the IEP is a binding document that will contain detailed specifications for test participation. State assessment participation is already congruent with the IEP.
- NAEP inclusion and accommodation decisions track very closely with the inclusion and accommodation decisions made for the state assessment. About the only grey area occurs for students who participate in their state assessments using accommodations that are not allowed by NAEP. However,

the NAEP decision will never be allowed to override the IEP. For ELL students, there may be greater flexibility, although some districts appear to have established standardized guidelines for testing ELL students that are based upon their level of English proficiency.

Therefore, it would appear that the modifications that have been made to the 2006 SD and ELL questionnaires are well supported. By placing the decision tree directly in the questionnaire, which is stipulated to be completed by the person most knowledgeable about an individual student, NAEP should be better assured that this person's expertise is tapped in the decision process. By providing the list of allowable accommodations with the questionnaire, NAEP should be better assured that this respondent has made an informed judgment in completing the questionnaire. And, by anchoring the decision tree to the state assessment, NAEP is acknowledging the criteria that will, in any case, be used by most respondents.

A few additional recommendations arise from the interviews. First, it would appear that, in the case of ELL students who are not protected by a binding document comparable to the IEP, local decisions on accommodations are sometimes made on the basis of resources rather than student welfare. The upshot may be that ELL students in schools with many ELL and SD students take NAEP under less favorable conditions than ELL students in schools with fewer ELL and SD students. NAEP should make an effort to determine the frequency with which this actually happens and then decide whether or not it is feasible to introduce procedural changes to alleviate these discrepancies.

Secondly, there appears to be some ambiguity as to when to record an exclusion as arising from the absence of an appropriate accommodation. In particular, students who participate in their state assessments through out-of-level testing or alternate assessments were sometimes coded as "required accommodation not offered" and sometimes as "cannot be assessed." In order to enhance the utility of these data for planning and analysis purposes, better guidance should be provided to those responsible for coding the exclusions.

Appendix: Interview Protocols

Initial School Contact
Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTION

Hi. My name is [NAME] from the American Institutes for Research. I am following up on the letter you received from [WESTAT CONTACT] about our study regarding the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Your school participated in NAEP on [INSERT TESTING DAYS].

As stated in the letter, we are a not-for-profit research organization that has been hired by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct an independent study in relation to NAEP. The purpose of the study is to understand how school personnel decide whether or not to include students with disabilities (SDs) and limited English proficient (LEP) students in NAEP and, if included, whether or not to provide accommodations.

We would like to talk with you because [WESTAT CONTACT] told us you were involved with coordinating NAEP at [NAME OF SCHOOL]. As part of our study, we would like to interview staff at your school who made decisions about whether and how to include SD and LEP students in the NAEP assessment. We would like to ask staff some questions about these decisions. We are not evaluating these decisions. We are only trying to find out more about how staff make them.

With your help, we would like to contact staff and ask them to participate in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary. As a thank you for your school's participation, we are offering a check made out to your school in the amount of fifty dollars. Interviews with staff will last approximately half-an-hour to one-hour.

Do you have a minute to help identify these staff?

[*If school contact declines, reiterate that individual staff participation is voluntary and that we are not evaluating the school or its staff. If contact declines again, thank and record response.*]

[*If school contact agrees, proceed with protocol.*]

Great. Thank you for your assistance. I would like to ask you a few questions about how NAEP was administered at your school. This will help us understand the process at your school and identify staff to interview. This should only take a few minutes.

Let's take a look at the NAEP administration schedule.

- **According to my copy of the schedule student numbers [insert numbers] were identified as students with disabilities. How were these students identified as students with disabilities for the purpose of NAEP?**

- **According to my copy of the schedule student numbers [insert numbers] were identified as limited English proficient students. How were these students identified as limited English proficient students for the purposes of NAEP?**

- **For each of the students identified as limited English proficient or as a student with a disability, please tell me who at your school decided to include or exclude the student in NAEP.**

- **How was this person involved in the decision?** *[Probe to make sure that the school personnel mentioned were the decision makers for each of the students.]*

- **Can you please provide the contact information for each of these personnel?**

We often find that it is helpful if school coordinators, such as yourself, inform school personnel about the study and that we will be contacting in the near future. Would you be able to contact staff and inform them about the study? Thank you very much for your time!

School Designee Interview Protocol

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for taking some time today to talk with me. My name is [NAME] from the American Institutes for Research. We are a not-for-profit research organization that has been hired by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education to conduct an independent study in relation to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Often called "The Nation's Report Card," NAEP is the only nationally representative, continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. As a congressionally mandated project of NCES within the U.S. Department of Education, NAEP provides a comprehensive measure of students' learning at critical junctures in their school experience. On [INSERT TESTING DAYS] your school participated in NAEP.

The purpose of the study is to understand how school personnel decide whether or not to include students with disabilities (SDs) and limited English proficient (LEP) students in NAEP and, if included, whether or not to provide accommodations.

We would like to talk with you because [SCHOOL CONTACT NAME] told us you were involved with decisions about whether and how to include SD/LEP students in the NAEP assessment. I'd like to ask you some questions about these decisions. We are not evaluating these decisions. We are only trying to find out more about how you make them. There are no wrong or right answers; I just want you to tell me about the process of deciding whether and how to include students in NAEP. We also want to know a little bit about the people who are making these decisions, so we have a few questions about your role and responsibilities at your school.

I want to assure you that all information obtained today will be kept confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this study. We will not use your name or school name when we report our results. Any quotes we use will not be attributed directly to you.

The interview will last approximately one hour/half an hour and your school will receive $50 for participating in this study. You may stop the interview at any time or refuse to answer any questions.

I'd like to tape record this interview. This is strictly for note-taking purposes; the tape will not be shared with anyone outside of the AIR project team. Is that okay? Is it okay to begin recording now? *If respondent consents, begin recording.*

Do you understand the purpose of the study and consent to participate?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Do you have the materials listed in the e-mail we sent you in front of you?

[Materials will be specified in scheduling e-mail and include: (1) SD/LEP questionnaire; (2) 4-page booklets for LEP and SD including the NAEP Criteria for Inclusion, NAEP Decision Tree, and Frequently Provided Accommodations; (3) 2005 NAEP Administration Schedule.]

Okay, let's begin.

Part 1 - Characteristics of School Designees

1. **Can you tell me a little bit about your position and responsibilities at [INSERT SCHOOL NAME]?**

    - **Title/position:**

    - **Years in current position:**

    - **Responsibilities:**

    If not answered above, use the following probes:

    - **Do you currently have, or have you had in the past, any responsibilities with respect to students with disabilities (SD) in [INSERT SCHOOL NAME]?**

    - **Do you currently have, or have you had in the past, any responsibilities with respect to limited English proficient (LEP) students at your school?**

2. **How did you become responsible for deciding whether students with disabilities and/or limited English proficient students in [INSERT SCHOOL NAME] were included in NAEP?**

    After obtaining answer to the question above, ask the following questions:

    - **Have you been involved with NAEP before this year?**

        ☐   Yes → **What were your previous responsibilities for NAEP?**

        ☐   No

Part 2 - Individual Student Decisions

Both the interviewer and respondent should have: (1) SD/LEP questionnaire; (2) 4-page booklet for LEP and SD including the NAEP Criteria for Inclusion, NAEP Decision Tree, and Frequently Provided Accommodations; and (3) 2005 NAEP Administration Schedule. If possible, determine the students for which the respondent was responsible prior to the interview based on the 2005 NAEP Administration Schedule.

[Insert ID numbers of sampled students for each school.]

Student 1: Included LEP student

Let's start with STUDENT NUMBER XX. I don't have the names in front of me, so I want to confirm the birth date. STUDENT NUMBER XX's birth date is MO/YR. Is that correct? *If yes, continue. If no, confirm another piece of information to ensure both the respondent and interviewer are discussing the same student.*

According to the schedule STUDENT XX was identified as a limited English proficient (LEP) student.

1. **How did you decide that this student should be identified as a limited English proficient student for purposes of NAEP?** *Probe about use of documents such as an education plan, who they talked to, if anyone, etc.*

.

   Also, according to the schedule, this student was included in NAEP with/without an accommodation.

2. **Who made the decision to include this student in the NAEP assessment with/without an accommodation?**

   ☐ Another person → **Why was this person chosen to make this decision?** *If another person was the decision-maker, ask for name and contact information for other school personnel. The questions below should be asked of the decision-maker.*

   ☐ Respondent → ***Continue to next item.***

3. Can you tell me how you decided to include this student in NAEP with/without an accommodation? Try to walk me through this decision, step-by-step.

Use the following probes if not answered in above question:

- **Did you consult any documents when making this decision (e.g., IEP, 504)?**

    ☐   No

    ☐   Yes → **Which documents? What information did you use from them?**

- **Did you consult with any other school staff when making this decision?**

    ☐   No

    ☐   Yes → **Who? What information did they provide?**

Identify the SD/LEP questionnaire.

4. How much, if at all, did you use the SD/LEP questionnaire when making this decision? Would you say:

```
1----------------------------2----------------------3------------------------4
not at all        a little           some              a lot
```

If answered a little, some, or a lot:

5. Can you tell me how you used the questionnaire?

- **Who completed the SD/LEP questionnaire for this student?**

    ☐   Another person (*please specify*) _____

    ☐   Respondent

- **On what basis was this person/were you assigned responsibility for completing the questionnaire for this student?**

- **Let's take a look at Question 14. Can you tell me how this person/you answered Question 14 for this student? Probe what information did the respondent use to answer question 14. Why they choose their answer instead of other response options.**

Identify the decision tree on page 3 of the NAEP Inclusion booklet.

6. **How much, if at all, did you also use the decision tree? Would you say:**

    1------------------------------2------------------------3------------------------4
    not at all   a little   some   a lot

If answered a little, some, or a lot:

7. **How did you use the decision tree?**

Identify the NAEP criteria document on page 2 of the NAEP Inclusion booklet.

8. **How much, if at all, did you use the document listing the NAEP criteria when making this decision? Would you say:**

    1------------------------------2------------------------3------------------------4
    not at all   a little   some   a lot

If answered a little, some, or a lot:

9. **Can you tell me how you used the document listing the NAEP criteria?**

Identify the list of accommodations on page 4 of the NAEP Inclusion booklet.

10. **How much, if at all, did you use the list of accommodations when making this decision? Would you say:**

    1------------------------------2------------------------3------------------------4
    not at all   a little   some   a lot

If answered a little, some, or a lot:

11. **Can you tell me how you used the list of accommodations?**

12. **Are there any other sources you used to make decisions that I have not mentioned?**

13. **How did you decide that the student should not be provided with an accommodation/should be provided with [insert accommodation]?**

14. **How hard was it to decide whether and how to include this student in NAEP? Would you say it was:**

    1----------------------------2-----------------------3------------------------4
    not at all   a little   some   a lot

    - **What about the process was *hard/easy*?**

If hard or very hard, ask:

    - **What could make the process of deciding whether and how to include this student easier?**

Repeat questions 1–14 for:

Student 2: Excluded LEP student

Student 3: Included SD student

Student 4: Excluded SD student

Part 3 - Concluding Questions

1. **Did you make decisions about whether or not to include SD and/or LEP students in NAEP prior to or during Westat's visit to your school?**

   ☐ Prior

   ☐ During

   - **What guidance, if any, did Westat provide in making this decision?**

If not answered in Part 1, ask:

2. **Have you been involved with other assessments at your school, for example the state assessments?**

   If respondent has responsibility for state or district assessments, ask:

   - **How does the process of deciding whether or not to include students in NAEP differ from deciding whether or not to include students in your state or district assessments? How is it the same?**

3. **Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't talked about today?**

Thank you very much for your time!