AN EXAMINATION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND ACHIEVEMENT TEST OUTCOMES

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by
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to compare the relationship between grade eight English language proficiency as measured by the ACCESS for ELL's assessment (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners) and achievement test outcomes on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment, a state mandated test. The ACCESS for ELLs is an annual, large-scale English language proficiency assessment given to kindergarten through grade twelve students who have been identified as English language learners. The ACCESS assessment is administered in English. Data from the Nation's Report Card (US. Department of National Center for Education Statistics, 2007a & 2007 b) show that ELL students lag behind their English proficient peers on standardized tests of reading. The inclusion of English language learners in state assessments has prompted issues regarding the validity and equity of assessment practices (Abedi, 2004).

The data for the study were gathered from an analyses of 8th grade ELL students' scores on the 2011 PSSA standardized assessment test administered in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania public school district. Data were also gathered from the analysis of 8th grade ELL assessments for the 2010-2011 school year. The study also assessed the predictive values of the criterion variables and the moderating effects of categorical variables by school: Ethnicity (Black, White,

Hispanic), ELL status (English Language Learner), Students with Disabilities status (SWD), Socioeconomic status (SES), which contribute to Pennsylvania's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status.

The study showed strong evidence that there is a significant relationship between the PSSA and language background as measured by the ACCESS assessment. Assessment. The implications of these data for the testing and assessment of ELL learners was discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In January 2002 President George W. Bush reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This legislation is commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Administrators and the Pennsylvania Department of Education began to use the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) as evidence that students in the commonwealth were meeting the goals of NCLB. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires that all children, including English language learners (ELLs), be proficient in reading and math by 2014 for adequate yearly progress (AYP) reporting. This policy should be implemented by providing reliable, valid and fair assessments for all students.

The number of children in the United States who do not speak English is increasing rapidly. There is new interest in enhancing the validity and equitability of the inferences drawn from ELL student assessments. Understanding the issues concerning instruction, classification and the assessment of ELL students is critical. Both the size and the diversity of the ELL population are growing. English language learners arrive in school with varied degrees of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Lovett, Palma, Frijters, Steinbach, Temple, et al,. (2008) have identified the ELL student population as having the highest drop-out rates, the highest rates of poverty and the lowest achievement scores.

By the year 2020, it is estimated that students who come from non-English speaking homes will increase from two million to six million (Abedi, 2003).

While English language learners are the fastest growing student population in our nation's schools, many funders and the general public are uninformed or misinformed about ELLs. Distinguishing between U.S. born ELL's and their immigrant peers is important because the disparate needs of these groups may require different approaches. CRESST reported (2001) ELL student performance is influenced by length of time in the United States, student mobility, overall grades and language proficiency. There are three main demographic groups that comprise English language learner populations. While many immigrants are ELLs, the majority of ELL students are U.S. born. Some ELLs are immigrants who were born outside of the country. These are the first-generation English language learners. There are also the second or third generation English language learners born in the United States and represent their family's second or third generations in this country. On a national level, 57% of English language learners are second or third generation (Hamburger, Koelsch, & Walqui, 2010).

The number of ELL students in the United States grew by about 900,000 students between 1993 and 1994. In 2000, the number of English language learners in U.S. schools was 4.4 million. The enrollment of school and language minority learners in English language learner programs increased by 95% while enrollment of the overall population of students increased by only 12%. Babb reported (2005) that some states, such as Georgia, experienced ELL population increases of more than 650%. The U. S. Census reports that by 2050, the Hispanic school-age population will exceed the non-Hispanic white school-age public school population. In 2009, the National Assessment of Education

Progress (NAEP) reported that 72% of 8th grade ELL students score no better than "basic" in mathematics as compared to 26% of non-ELL students (Wolf, Herman & Dietel, 2010).

According to Ikpa (2008), the goal of No Child Left Behind is to eliminate gaps in achievement by balancing the public values of excellence, choice adequacy, efficiency and equity. NCLB has increased the pressure on school districts to increase language minority learner's academic achievement in subject areas. However, performance on national assessments demonstrate that language minority learners struggle to achieve academically at the same levels as their native English speaking peers. This performance gap can be attributed to several factors including parent educational level and poverty. There are also inconsistencies in content covered on language background tests, a clear definition of ELL students, and psychometric characteristics of assessments (Abedi, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Since the enactment of No Child Left Behind, schools receiving federal funding have been required to administer a state-wide assessment annually to all students. NCLB legislation requires all students to be proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014. Thirty percent of the schools held accountable for adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets for the ELL subgroup under NCLB did

not make AYP for that subgroup in 2005-2006. In high poverty schools, this percentage was substantially higher. While English language learners are included in these assessments, the criteria used to determine entry, exit, placement and assessments for English language learners vary from state to state and district to district across the United States. Therefore, the standardized testing of ELL students may be invalid, thereby producing incorrect assessments of these students' achievement levels. Appropriate educational policies for ELL students are needed due to the rapidly changing demographics of the U.S. population.

English language learners are the fastest growing testing subgroup in our nation. State and federal laws are unclear as to the criteria used when making placement and assessment decisions for English language learners. These guidelines vary across state and school district lines. English language learners are scoring low on standardized tests and ELLs are put into a category of "not English proficient" without investigation as to why their scores are lagging behind those of their peers. These low scores could be attributed to language variables as well as socioeconomic status and the dialect in the student's home languages and home cultures. If students have not yet acquired language skills, they may not be able to adequately demonstrate their knowledge in content area assessments.

The accountability measures implemented by the states as a result of the federal mandates of the No Child Behind Act of 2001 have created the need for states to take a closer look at the effectiveness of assessment practices. There is great controversy over the quality, consistency and rigor of formative tests used to

assess English language learners. There are inconsistencies in determining what content these tests measure and whether they mirror the state-wide assessment. The adequacy and consistency of ELL student classification and reclassification are key issues to consider in improving the validity of ELL assessments (Wolf, Herman & Dietel, 2010).

Need for Study

The idea for the study resulted from witnessing specific educational decisions made on behalf of English language learners during the period from 2004-2009 in the Philadelphia School District. The study is needed to explain how the assessments used to determine language proficiency relate to academic content assessed during the administration of the statewide test. The construct of language on an achievement test is qualitatively different from language proficiency as measured on an assessment of English as a second language. When utilizing test scores, the appropriateness of test scores must be considered. Evidence should also be presented when justifying the use of test scores. Are policies surrounding background language assessments beneficial to educational practices or detrimental to student learning and school outcomes? A key issue affecting the validity of score interpretations is that most tests utilized by states were developed for native English speakers. ELL students are not represented within the norming population. In addition, Title 1 requires state assessments be consistent with widely accepted professional testing standards.

A critical look at standardized test reporting reveals data among English language learners indicate the need to develop or adopt valid assessments and accountability systems for ELL students. The academic gap existing between English language learners and the non-ELL population is significant. While NCLB has raised awareness about the need to improve ELL students' learning and academic performance, it has also generated challenges for states in addressing the validity of accountability systems.

Schools are under enormous pressure to raise test scores due to federal No Child Left Behind legislation. The PSSA is the instrument used in Pennsylvania schools to determine whether Adequate Yearly Progress is met. While high stakes achievement tests are used for assessment and reclassification of ELLs for accountability purposes, they are likely to reduce the validity and reliability of inferences drawn about content-based knowledge Research has demonstrated that when ELL students take English language tests, their lack of English language proficiency is source of measurement error. This fact has been widely recognized in the psychometric field, and by the Office of Civil Rights (Abedi, 2004).

Language background is another factor that impacts assessment results. In Pennsylvania, the ACCESS assessment is used to determine English language proficiency. There is a lack of research explaining placement, entry, exit and assessment guidelines as they relate to English language learners. While English language learners' PSSA reading scores lag behind those of their peers, it is important that educators gain a better understanding of the relationship between these two assessments and how they correlate to PSSA outcomes for the purposes

of adequate yearly progress. According to Abedi (2004), there was a correlation of only .223 between Language Assessment Scales and LEP classification codes. There was also a lack of alignment on existing English proficiency test contents with English language proficiency standards (national, state or ESOL standards).

The focus of the study is whether the ACCESS correlates with the PSSA. Little research on the impact of placement, entry, exit and assessment guidelines as they relate to English language learners currently exists. It is important that educators gain a better understanding of the relationship between these two assessments and how they impact student achievement. While language proficiency factors are clearly important in ELL students' academic achievement, a number of other background factors have been found to interact along with language in affecting school success. There have been studies done on low academic achievement. However, it is essential to not only look at what is not working within this crisis of low academic achievement, there is a need to examine what factors contribute to successful students. Overall, this current study is necessary for educators to gain a better understanding of English Language Learners and their educational challenges.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to compare the relationship between grade eight English language proficiency as measured by the ACCESS for ELL's assessment (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners) and achievement test outcomes on the

Pennsylvania System of Student Assessment, a state mandated test. The ACCESS for ELLs is an annual, large-scale English language proficiency assessment given to kindergarten through grade twelve students who have been identified as English language learners. In 2010, the assessment was given to over 900, 000 students in 23 states..

Student's ACCESS assessment levels were compared with achievement test data of the PSSA, a state-mandated test. The study examined eighth grade students in the School District of Philadelphia. The decision to use only the 8th grade students was made as the purpose of the study is to examine an accessible group of students.

The study examined the predictive values of the ACCESS test, and the state achievement test (PSSA). The ACCESS assessment is administered in English. The study also examined the moderating effect of categorical variables on the correlations between the ACCESS and the state test. The categorical variables used in the study are attributed to each student. During the 2011 school year, to meet the performance measure required for AYP, schools and every measurable subgroup were required to have at least 78% of all tested students score proficient or higher in math. Eighty one percent of all students tested were required to be proficient or higher in reading. NCLB (2001) defines subgroups as major ethnic/racial groups, Students with Individual Education Plans, English Language Learners and economically disadvantaged students.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to contribute to the existing literature investigating the relationship between students' English language proficiency and outcomes on state achievement tests.

The following research questions are examined:

1. Is there any relationship between eighth grade English language learners' proficiency on the reading portion of the PSSA and English language learners' ACCESS assessment levels?
2. What is the relationship between PSSA and ELL student grades?
3. Do teacher grades correlate with ACCESS scores?
4. What is the relationship between the demographic variables (Ethnicity, Socioeconomic status (SES), English Language Learner status (ELL), and student with disabilities status (SWD, utilized in determining schools' AYP status, and the ACCESS test?

Limitations of the Study

The major aim of this study is to provide an increased understanding of assessment practices impacting ELL student achievement. There are multiple ways of measuring academic achievement; PSSA and ACCESS scores may not reflect actual learning. Many Philadelphia schools may experience a transient

population which could affect the outcome of this study. The researcher has worked as a teacher and administrator in the district. Her perceptions suggest that tests used to measure ELL student achievement are invalid due to programmatic variables existing across state and district lines. This may have an effect on data interpretation.

A limitation of the present study is that it focused on traditional middle schools within an urban school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The PSSA is not administered outside of Pennsylvania. This could limit the generalizability of the obtained results to other school districts with a different socioeconomic status or ethnic compositions. For example, the ethnic composition of the English language learner in Philadelphia may not be representative of many other school systems.

Another major limitation of this study is the variability of each schools programming and ELL policies. For example, there is variation across states and districts. Within individual schools, teachers had different levels of expertise and teaching experience. Each school had different resources and school climates that may have an affect on test scores.

In this study, there were gaps between Ells and non-ELLs. Additional research is necessary to help identify the variables that influence the gaps. Some students receive different levels of service depending upon their ELL level. Program duration, program evaluation and student support vary depending upon state or district requirements. With respect to the study, much of the available research does not include information on ELL group differences or an adequate

representation of the student population. Therefore, the study may be limited in several respects. While evidence supports both socio-cultural and socioeconomic explanations for low academic achievement in our society, much of the research in this current study does not separate ELL groups.

For the purposes of this study, reading and math scores of 8th grade ELL students were analyzed for students in the Philadelphia school district. Only scores of those students were analyzed; therefore, generalizations were limited to this grade only. The study is also limited by both the validity of the PSSA and ACCESS tests. Further studies are necessary in considering the diversity of this population.

There is variability in how students' ACCESS scores are measured and how students are placed for English language learner services. This may mean individual students are taught using different curricular materials. Students categorized as having higher ESOL or ACCESS levels may have access to higher level curriculum materials. Those tracked in lower levels may not be exposed to the same academic content. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized with the single case study.

Data is delimited to grade eight students at 8 traditional public middle schools in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Only two assessments were examined. The PSSA is not administered outside of Pennsylvania. In addition, ELL groups are not separated in this study.

Definitions

The following terms and definitions will be used in the study.

1) ACCESS Assessment-Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners is a proficiency assessment given in grades k-12 who have been identified as English language learners (www.wida.com)
2) Accommodation-Modifications to spoken or written language to make it comprehensible for English language learners (Haynes, 2007).
3) Advanced-Superior academic performance indicating an in-depth understanding of the skills included in Pennsylvania's academic standards (a scaled score > 1508, mean = 1300, standard deviation = 100) (www.pde.state.pa.us).
4) Basic-Marginal academic performance, work approaching, but not yet reaching, satisfactory performance. Performance indicates a partial understanding and limited display of the skills included in Pennsylvania's Academic Standards, and the student may need additional instructional opportunities and/or increased student academic commitment to achieve the Proficient level (a scale score of 1167-1303) (www.pde.state.pa.us).
5) Below Basic-Inadequate academic performance that indicates little understanding and minimal display of the skills included in the

Pennsylvania Academic Content Standards. There is a major need for additional instructional opportunities and/or increased student academic commitment to achieve Proficient level (a scaled score < 1167) (www.pde.state.pa.us).

6) Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)- The academic language of the classroom, which usually takes 5-10 years for English language learners to acquire (Haynes, 2007).
7) Criterion –Referenced Test-An assessment where an individual's performance is compared to a specific learning objective or performance standard. The individual student is not compared to the performance of other students (Frankel & Wallen, 2009).
8) Elementary and Secondary Education Act-Federal legislation established in 1965 that funds primary and secondary education, establishment of high standards and accountability (www.ed.gov/legislation)
9) English as a Foreign Language-A program designed to teach English to students in a non-English speaking environment. An example is a program that teaches students to speak Japanese (Haynes, 2007).
10) English Language Learners (ELL)-Students with limited English proficiency, usually students who are in an ESL or bilingual program (Haynes, 2007).
11) English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)-A program of English language instruction for non-English speakers (Haynes, 2007).
12) Language Minority Students-Students whose primary language is not

English (Haynes, 2007).

13) Limited English Proficiency (LEP)-Students whose English language skills are limited (Haynes, 2007).

14) Mainstreaming-The placement of English language learners in regular education classes that are designed for native English speakers (2007).

15) Native language-A person's first language or the language used by a student at home with family members (Haynes, 2007).

16) Norm-Referenced Assessment-The process of evaluating and grading students by ranking them against the performance of their peers (Frankel & Wallen, 2009).

17) Predictor Variable-In correlation, the variable used in attempting to predict the criterion variable (Frankel & Wallen, 2009).

18) Proficient-Satisfactory academic performance indicating a solid understanding and adequate display of the skills included in Pennsylvania's Academic Standards (a scaled score 1304-1508) (www.pde.state.pa.us).

19) Teacher -Assigned Grades-Students' final course grades as defined by school district policy for grading cycle. Grades are a numerical average of the students'coursework, assessments and homework. These grades are reported by the district for each report card cycle (www.philasd.org).

20) Title I Funds-As part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Financial assistance given to Local Educational Agencies for the education of children of low-income families (www.ed.gov).

21) Title III-Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students. The overarching purpose is to ensure that limited-English proficient students, including immigrant children and youth, attain English proficiency and meet the same challenging academic content and achievement standards that other students are expected to meet (www.ed.gov).

Significance of the Study

When the federal government reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2002 (NCLB), Adequate Yearly Progress became the focus for many public schools. Today's educators are challenged with facilitating nation-wide improvements in teaching and learning to ensure success in a global society. Meeting Adequate Yearly Progress targets has been further complicated due to the inaccurate assessment of language minority learners.

Many ELL students enter school with varying degrees of English literacy skills. English language learners come from many linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Socioeconomic issues, immigration issues and parental educational issues combined with language issues further complicate the schooling experience for English language learners.

The study provides specific, empirical evidence about relationships among ELL student language background proficiency and achievement tests with regard

to NCLB (2001) requirements. A paucity of research exists regarding the relationship between language proficiency tests and school assessments in measuring student achievement. Furthermore, there is not enough available research examining the relationship between scores on the ACCESS assessment and scores on the PSSA, the state mandated test. This study is an attempt to examine the relationship between language background proficiency and the outcomes of achievement tests. Assessment results could very well be flawed due to language background variables. What can educational leaders learn about assessment practices for English language learners? The results of this study may serve as a guide to other school systems faced with similar ELL issues. The information provided in the study is important for planning interventions and addressing the needs of ELL students. Understanding the issues involved in addressing instruction and assessment will help enable policymakers and practitioners realize the limitations of the nation's NCLB accountability measures for the ELL subgroup. ELL students lag behind their mainstream peers on assessments, in part, because of factors not related to their academic achievement but because of factors that influence performance outcomes. Therefore, changes must be made to instructional practices as well as assessments. Some factors contributing to the performance gap include parent education, poverty and schooling conditions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of the study was to use existing data to compare the relationship between grade eight English language proficiency as measured by the ACCESS for ELL's assessment (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners) and achievement test outcomes on the Pennsylvania System of Student Assessment, a state mandated test. The ACCESS for ELLs is an annual, large-scale English language proficiency assessment given to kindergarten through grade twelve students who have been identified as English language learners. In 2010, the assessment was given to over 900, 000 students in 23 states. There have been many studies of English Language Learners and student achievement. Few studies have been found to examine ELL student achievement in Pennsylvania.

This chapter will begin with an overview of the history of ELL in the United States and the definition of ELL learners, the second section will address accountability under NCLB. The fourth section will explore language proficiency and the ACCESS assessment. The fifth section will present an overview of cultural diversity and socioeconomics of ELL students. Finally, the chapter will conclude with assessment practices.

History of English Language Learner's in the United States

Bilingual education originated in the colonial era out of the desire and necessity of non-English speaking emigrants to educate their children and their communities as immigrants from Europe in the United States (Brunn, 1999). These immigrants often formed communities in which they continued to use their native tongue not only for educational purposes but also for daily life. Many immigrants recognize the importance of maintaining their cultural and linguistic ties with the homeland.

Entering the 1960s and 1970s, a political movement advocating for language rights began in the United States and a nationwide debate over the need for bilingual education came from many sources. At a time when civil rights were one of the nation's primary concerns, education reform became a priority alongside the War on Poverty. The failure of English only instructions could no longer be ignored as limited English proficient students in English only classrooms were falling drastically behind their peers and dropping out at an alarming rate. Educators and policymakers became more sensitive to the needs of language minority students (Wright, 2005).

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was first introduced, as a bill, by Texas democrat Ralph Yarborough. Yarborough wanted a bill that would provide federal funds supporting bilingual education programs. The bill eventually became the BEA during a period of growing immigration concern and civil rights

awareness. This bill, the Bilingual Education Act, was entered into federal law as Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The BEA was designated as a means of facilitating the learning of children with a different native language than English. Since 1968, the ESEA has undergone six reauthorizations (1974, 1978, 1984, 1988, 1994, and 2001). Each reauthorization has resulted in numerous changes to the BEA. This has included changes in the target population, definition and types of programs to serve this population and views of the purposes and goals of the programs. According to Abedi (2004) the biggest changes came in 2001 when Title VII (The Bilingual Education Act) was eliminated and replaced with new regulations under Title III (Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students).

The Supreme Court also stepped in with a landmark decision in the 1971 case of Lau v. Nichols (www.ed.gov). The Lau v. Nichols case was brought by a group of Chinese American students who lacked English proficiency, but were placed in mainstream classrooms. This case constituted a major suit against the school district of San Francisco. This case established bilingual education in the United States. Lau v. Nichols addressed the inequalities in public education experienced by an increasingly diverse population. The case asserted that non-English-speaking or limited English proficient students have a right to an education and schools are required to take affirmative steps to overcome language barriers of non-English-speaking children (Wright, 2005).

Definition of ELL

As outlined in The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, (NCLB,

2002) An ELL student is: (a) age 3 through 21; (b) enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary of secondary school; (c) not born in the United States of whose native language is not English; (d) a Native America, Alaskan Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; (c) from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on an individual's level of English language proficiency; (f) migratory and comes from an environment where English is not the dominant language; and (g) has difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language that may deny the individual the ability to meet the state's proficient level of achievement and the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where English is the language of instruction or to participate fully in society (NCLB, 2002, Title IX).

This definition is primarily based on two sources of information (1) students' language background information and (2) the level of English language background of students (eg., country of birth, native language, and type and amount of a language other than English spoken at home) generated from the Home Language Survey. Students' level of English proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, listening and comprehension comes from existing tests of English language proficiency assessment. This operational definition of Limited English Proficiency, by NCLB, is interpreted by different states, districts and schools (Abedi, 2004).

English Language Proficiency Assessment and Accountability Under NCLB

Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) with the goal of increasing academic achievement and closing the achievement gap among

different student groups, with a focus on those who are economically disadvantaged, those who represent major racial and ethnic groups, those with disabilities, and those with limited English proficiency. The Title III section of the law supports the need for language instruction, and requires fair assessment and evaluation of limited English proficient and immigrant students in oral language, reading, and writing skills in English.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has increased the focus on assessment of English Language Learners (ELL students). The accountability measures implemented by the states as a result of the federal mandates of the No Child Behind Act of 2001 have created the need for states to take a closer look at effective assessment practices. Title III of NCLB addresses the English Language Learner subgroup. States are required to set goals and demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Limited English proficient students reach "basic" level of AYP status less than half as often as non- limited English proficient students. According to Abedi (2002), one study showed that language factors are likely to reduce the validity and reliability drawn about students' content-based knowledge. ELL and non-ELL students had the greatest performance differences in language related subscales of tests in areas such as reading. In addition, the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) found that student language backgrounds affect student performance in content-based areas such.

The validity and reliability of these achievement tests is threatened, particularly for ELL students. In Pennsylvania, public schools that receive Title 1

funds and do not meet minimum national requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress are mandated to make improvements. It is essential to not only look at what is not working within this concern over low academic achievement, there is also a need to examine what factors contribute to successful students. This includes focusing on variables related to resiliency and high academic achievement in order for affirmative practices to be further developed and replicated. While a single assessment cannot project a student's school experience, or learning in its entirety, appropriate indicators for measuring learning can be developed. Overall, this current study is necessary for educators to gain a better understanding of what factors are impacting PSSA test takers with limited English proficiency.

In a Nation at Risk (1983), authored by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, funding and support for education reform, in what was considered a mediocre system, were promised. In the 1990's the U.S. set goals for standards based education reform. On January 8, 2002 President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The law has faced criticism from policymakers and practitioners who find several of its mandates unrealistic. NCLB has had a great impact on state policies in assessing ELL students. The legislation also requires the inclusion of all students in large-scale assessments for accountability purposes. In addition, states are required to develop sound and valid assessments in order to measure the ELL students' English language proficiency. Approximately five million English language learners were enrolled in public schools throughout the United States during the 2003-2004 school year.

This is 10 percent of the total school population. Due to the demands brought on by NCLB, teachers and administrators face many challenges in teaching and assessing this population (Haynes, 2007).

The LEP subgroup is not a well-defined group of students. Inconsistent Limited English Proficiency classification, and the sparse population of LEP students in many states, threatens the validity of the adequate yearly progress reporting. The LEP subgroup lack of stability threatens accountability, because students attaining English proficiency move out of the subgroup. The linguistic complexity of assessment tools may lower LEP student performance in areas with greater language demand. Finally, schools with larger numbers of LEP students with lower baselines may require greater gains. Some researchers argue these tests reflect LEP students' language proficiency without accurately assessing their content knowledge. There are few appropriate testing accommodations and modifications offered to students taking a test in a language they are not proficient in; English the language of most standardized tests (Batt, 2005). Various policy reports, papers and literature reviews have cited the lack of standard operational definitions for what it means to be an ELL (Leseaux & Raagan, 2006).

Assessment of English Language Proficiency in Educational Settings

Ensuring children are provided with instruction and services are essential to the assessment practice. Assessment is located in every aspect of an ELLs education from screening or admission, determination of special and individual needs for instructional planning, and to promote or retain. Outcomes of testing ELL students range from administering second-language interventions, adapting instruction, student progress,

administering services, and federal accountability requirements (Espinoza & Lopez, 2007). Most assessment practices associated with ELL students can be categorized as formative, summative or screenings.

Academic achievement is difficult to determine. The success or failure of programs to remedy the disparity between ELL and non-ELL students should be determined by means other than a single academic achievement test administered in English. The construct of language on an achievement test is qualitatively different than language proficiency as measured on an assessment of English as a second language. The process of developing new language skills is difficult and requires time. ELLs are a heterogeneous group. Lumping ELLs into one category and trying to identify strategies and assessments that work for the group is not an appropriate approach. Some studies have shown it takes five to seven years for most ELLs to gain sufficient mastery of academic English. Implementation of ELL programs vary across states, districts, schools and classrooms. Much of the controversy regarding the education of ELL students focuses on the amount of instruction provided in the child's native language. Proponents of bilingual education argue that without support in their native language, ELL students will fall behind academically while they are learning English. In addition, testing students in a language in which they are not yet proficient is problematic for multiple reasons. The test may not accurately reflect the student's abilities and competencies being measured if the test performance depends on test taker's knowledge of English. Limited English proficiency might be considered a source of measurement error on PSSA scores where the test is used to determine

academic achievement. Language proficiency has been shown to influence performance on achievement tests. Limited English Proficiency status was also shown to be a significant predictor of both language arts and math scores on the California Assessment of Progress. Poverty was a stronger predictor (Wright & Michael, 1989). Some states have developed native language assessments. For example, New York has translated its Regents exams into Spanish, Haitian-Creole, Russian, Chinese and Korean for all subjects except English and language arts (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a).

The federal NCLB appropriation must be adequate to support the states, districts and schools in the meeting the existing federal requirements for LEP students. Many of the schools containing high numbers of ELL students are located in the neediest school districts. The law does little to address the resource inequities that exist between schools and districts, yet it requires all schools to meet the same achievement goals. Schools containing high numbers of ELL students often do not have instructional materials or properly trained teachers to serve these students. There are also significant numbers of ELL students who never exit ELL status and continue lagging behind their peers. There is a need to identify methods to help long-term ELL students acquire English language proficiency, exit ELL status and increase academic achievement. There is also a need to determine instructional needs for ELL students at different levels of English proficiency. Differentiated support is needed to address the broad range of performance within this heterogeneous group.

Formative assessments are very different from summative assessments. Formative assessments are used to help guide instruction and aid in teacher's

gathering individual student information. These assessments provide detailed pictures of students' linguistic abilities so that instruction may be adapted to their needs. They are used to guide curriculum and teaching strategies that the teacher can use as data to differentiate classroom instruction in monitoring academic practice. Summative assessments are cumulative and are used to determine whether students have learned what the instructor intended (Espinoza & Lopez, 2007).

Ongoing and multiple assessments provide better results than those of a single assessment (Espinoza and Lopez 2007). Research suggests frequent formative assessments for ELL students are best for pinpointing skills being taught (Edwards and Guofang, 2010). Research-based recommendations for assessment have been made due to the difficulties inherent in accurate assessment of ELLS. Multiple measurement techniques are often a useful way to triangulate measures of students' language ability.

Leseaux and Ragan (2006) reported on the criteria used to determine which minority learners are designated English language learners (ELLs). They determined there is a lack of standardization and clarity of exit and entry into English language learner programs at federal, state and district levels. When students in grades kindergarten through twelve register for school, their parents must complete a home language survey. The surveys are questionnaires that assess what languages are being spoken in the child's home to determine whether the child should be assessed for English language proficiency. The purpose of the English language proficiency test is to determine whether the child falls into the

category of English language learner called limited English proficiency under Title III of the ESEA. The student then qualifies for English language support services funded by the US Department of Education's office of English language acquisition (Hamburger, Koelsch, & Walqui, 2010). English language proficiency test scores are among the most important criteria used in ELL classification (Abedi, 2004).

One of the biggest challenges for ELLs is their lack of academic language skills necessary for success in school. A critical component of the new Title III legislation requires states to align their ELP standards with their academic content standards at each grade level. English language proficiency standards must be developed with each state's academic content standards. This modification to the law forces states to examine the language demands of content-area standards and to ensure ELLs' language skills are being developed to a level of success in mastering content-area knowledge. According to Abedi (2004), there are major concerns over classification and valid measurement of ELL students. Multiple measurements of students' level of English proficiency could help with decision-making processes for ELL students.

Wright (2005) examined some of the ELL issues associated with NCLB. They include the following:

- The goals of many ELL programs are to mainstream the students as soon as possible.
- NCLB no longer makes a distinction between bilingual programs and special alternative instructional programs.

- While ELL students must be tested, many states are finding creative ways to exclude ELL test scores so that schools are not held accountable for an ELL subgroup.

ACCESS for ELL's Assessment

In 2003, the World- Class Instructional Design and Assessment Consortium drafted the WIDA English Language Proficiency Standards for English Language Learners in Kindergarten through Grade 12 and began work on Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English language learners (ACCESS for ELLs) English language proficiency test. WIDA piloted and field tested the new assessment in 2004, and by spring 2005, the test was operation in Alabama, Maine and Vermont. In 2006, twelve WIDA Consortium member states tested students using ACCESS for ELLs. WIDAs aligned assessment includes the standards and reflects an identical philosophical and theoretical basis. The connections between the theoretical basis and communicative competence with second language teaching and testing, first recognized by Canale and Swain (1980) are included in WIDAs English language proficiency standards and test (www.wida.us). The overall ACCESS composite score are weighted 15% listening, 15% speaking, 35% reading, and 35% writing. The Oral and Literacy composite scores are weighted 50% for each domain, and the Comprehension composite score is 30% listening and 70% reading.

Oral language proficiency, speaking and listening, are key social skills measured on the assessment. Scarborough (2005) reports oral language is a precursor to reading. Oral language proficiency tests are used to determine

whether language minority school-age children are able to meet the academic task demands of monolingual instruction in English. Language minority children who meet a defined criterion are expected to be proficient and to be able to participate in academic tasks. Lesaux and Ragan (2004) reported that, individuals responsible for selecting oral language proficiency tests, for use in making high stakes irreversible decisions regarding student knowledge and ability either for instruction in a language other than English or transitioning students, should carefully examine test content to ascertain whether tests are measuring cognitively demanding academic content.

August and Shanahan (2006) point out that the use of students first language in instruction, especially in reading instruction, promotes higher levels of achievement in English reading. The National Literacy Panel conducted a meta-analysis of 17 studies focusing on this issue and concluded that whether English language learners are taught to read in their mother tongue and then English, or taught to read in both languages simultaneously, using a native language produces better results than exclusively teaching them literacy skills in English. According to the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Multilingual Curriculum and Programs Handbook (2012), students are exited from services based on language proficiency, report card grades and state and district assessments. There are specific exit criteria and cutoff scores based on grade level.

Cultural Diversity

There are many challenges associated with assessing English language

learners such as cultural biases. Schools and communities must develop better ways to connect with families of English language learners. These students are very likely to experience academic difficulties. Communication with families is critical in increasing the achievement levels of students from cultural and linguistically diverse families. Families have different traditions, expectations, opinions, cultural values, and educational levels. Depending on family background characteristics, language, and culture, test results may vary across the country (Babb, 2005).

Ballantyne, Levy, & Sanderman, (2008) maintain that socio-cultural norms must be acknowledged and valued by teachers of ELL students. This includes non-verbal modes such as body language, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact and distance between speakers. Teachers must also learn to incorporate students' background knowledge into the structure of the classroom. Often times, test items involve cultural knowledge unfamiliar to the ELL. Standardized tests may not accurately reflect what students know. Most standardized tests are normed for the native English speaker. ELL students may also be unable to demonstrate the skill being tested. Another common problem with these assessments is that they often exhibit linguistic bias because they are simply translated from one language to another. For example, a test translated into Spanish will present some difficulties because varieties of Spanish differ from one region to another. As a result, additional supports are necessary for overall student success in school.

The literature suggests that current English language proficiency tests being utilized to fulfill Title III requirements of NCLB, are based on a variety of different theoretical emphases. English language learners differ in their literacy development. Some first-generation ELLs arrive in the US with uninterrupted schooling. There are also students who can read and write at grade level in their own language. Others have histories of interrupted schooling and low literacy levels in their native language. Many students have repeatedly changed instructional programs back and forth as they transition between schools. Many of the parents and families have had little to no formal education in English. Nationwide, 70% of 8th grade ELL language learners read below the proficient level on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress. Many middle school students who are native speakers of English do not perform well in these measures either. Many English language learners have not developed the academic usage of English (Nichols, 2008).

While states vary on how they define English language learners' the numbers of students are increasing. Abedi (2002) reports U.S. residents not born in the United States increased by 30%, from 19.8 million to 25.8 million between 1990 and 1997. In 2000, 4.4 million limited English proficient students were enrolled in U.S. schools.

Socioeconomic Status of English Language Learners

Low levels of academic achievement have limited the advancement of underserved students (low-income, underrepresented minority, or first generation to attend college) in the United States. Education has long been at the center of

underserved populations' efforts to achieve social justice and economic empowerment in this country. Much of the research that focuses on the academic achievement of English language learners does not focus on urban middle school populations. Middle level education is critical in raising high school graduation rates and preparing students to succeed in college.

Available data strongly suggest that children from homes where English is not spoken well are more likely to be of a lower socioeconomic status then children in the general population (Ballantyne, Levy, & Sanderman, 2008). The National Task Force On Early Childhood Education for Hispanics, 2007) recommends substantial growth in the number of teachers who are proficient in Spanish and those who have familiarity with the cultural background of their Hispanic students (Leseaux & Ragan, 2006). Further, students who are taught in classrooms where teachers speak the first language of English language learners are likely to have a greater number of interactions with their students, than those who do not share a common language. There is also likely to be less bullying in these classrooms. In families where one or both parents do not speak English parents are less likely to read to their children regularly than in families where both parents speak English (Edwards & Guofang, 2010). According to the National Middle Schools Association (2006), data from large urban districts working with urban middle and high schools have shown that for the majority of students who drop out of school the cause is failure of schools to respond to their needs. Having high expectations for students is imperative. Educators must gain a better understanding of all students' strengths and weaknesses and develop

programs and practices that help all students to achieve their true potential. Raising student achievement means understanding all realms associated with middle years populations (Balfanz, Durnham, Farley-Ripple, Mac Iver, & Plank, 2000). Research indicates approximately 50 percent of the dropouts in the United States are produced by 15 percent of the high schools, all of which serve populations with high poverty rates (Balfanz & Neild). Further, most of these high schools have two or more feeder middle schools. Often times, there are students at each school in need of comprehensive and sustained supports. A lack of language proficiency can lead to low-level tracking in middle and high school.

English language learners are more likely than children in the general population to come from poor communities and experience more disadvantages than non-ELL students. Educators and policymakers should be aware that young English language learners are less likely to have received the healthcare support needed. Many of these children arrive at school and are not prepared to learn. Large numbers of these students have not attended preschool. They are also more likely to also come from households were parents have not graduated from high school.

Students who are at risk due to poverty, race, ethnicity, language, or other factors are those least well served by their schools. These students often attend schools where they are tracked into substandard courses and programs holding low expectations for learning (Balfanz & Nield). In some low performing schools, there is little change. In addition, in economically and racially diverse schools that use ability grouping, students from low-income backgrounds and

students of color are disproportionately left out of advanced classes. During the middle years, high percentages of dropouts present distress signals long before they actually drop out of school. These four signals include: a final grade of F in math or English, attendance below 80% and an unsatisfactory behavior mark in at least one class.

Assessment Practices

Assessments are critical in middle school. A lack of language proficiency can lead to low-level tracking in middle and high school. Students who are English Language Learners do not fare well in school socially or academically, and they fall behind their non- ELL peers year by year. ELL students are also more likely to have unqualified teachers and lack access to quality curriculum (Hamburger, Koelsch, & Walqui, 2010).

Wright (2005) speculated that with the possibility of each state using a different English language proficiency assessment, a language minority learner may be designated ELL in one state and may not qualify for services in another. Misidentification may also result in the placement of a student in a class that does not address his or her academic ability. The situation is further complicated by historically inaccurate assessment of language minority learners since the passage of the NCLB mandate of 2002. Current policies do not address content development or individual academic skills and development. Current practices have promoted the mainstreaming of English language learners as soon as possible (Wright, 2005). Proficiency measures are needed to guide instruction, assessment, classification, placement, progress reporting, and fair decision-

making in the accommodation of ELL students. Inconsistencies in classifying ELL students may have profound effects on these students' opportunities to learn as well as academic achievement and development. Currently, specific guidelines explaining how to classify and reclassify English language learners is unavailable. Therefore, individual states and districts identify and reclassify ELL students using their own guidelines.

Much attention has been paid to interventions in the early grades in the belief that giving students a strong start would put them on a path to success. For the purposes of this study, 8th grade students are being examined. However, the United States still does not have a cohesive national policy for the middle grades, which represent one-third of a student's K-12 education. In addition, there are large concentrations of poor and minority students receiving weak academic preparations in their middle school years. Furthermore, many of our nation's neighborhood high schools have high dropout rates. Policymakers have also sought to improve high school education by raising graduation requirements and aligning curricula to better prepare students for college and careers. Low-performing schools are often located in neighborhoods where there are high levels of poverty. These schools usually contain greater numbers of teachers who have low expectations of students, and teachers are burnt out, school facilities are run down, overcrowded, and disorderly.

The study used existing data to compare the relationship between grade eight English language proficiency as measured by the ACCESS for ELL's assessment (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for

English Language Learners) and achievement test outcomes on the Pennsylvania System of Student Assessment, a state mandated test. The number of children who arrive in school with a language other than English is rising rapidly. These children on average are achieving at rates below their peers. Students' assessment results may be affected by their language background variables. Educators and policymakers have a responsibility to educate themselves about the individual needs and backgrounds of these children. One critical step toward implementing federal policies aimed at improving the achievement gap is the effective collection of data.

All students should have equal access to effective programs and resources that will enable them to achieve academically and be able to develop the skills necessary to be successful in a their k-12 years and beyond. An inclusive environment ensures that all students, regardless of race, disability, strengths, or weaknesses, are significantly involved in the school community (Balfanz & Nield). Building a sense of community makes students more likely to share perspectives of their teachers, ultimately leading to increased academic achievement. Teachers who lack high expectations for student learning have a dramatic impact on underserved students. Based on their own beliefs about race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background, educators make judgments about students' ability to learn, interest in learning, and chances for success in college and beyond. It is important to look at what assessment policies and procedures are effective in increasing student achievement (Camblin, 2003).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter addresses how data were collected for various middle school school students. The research design, research questions and data collection procedures are presented. Overall, the purpose of this quantitative study was to use existing data to examine the relationship between the language proficiency of English language learners and their outcomes on achievement tests. The PSSA reading data and ELL assessment data of eighth grade students at eight traditional public middle schools in the School District of Philadelphia are examined. There have been many studies on student achievement but few have been found that examine the relationship between language proficiency of English language learners and their outcomes on achievement tests. The data collected for the study were requested and approved by the Philadelphia school district. The current study was approved by the Temple University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The research design in this study is descriptive. Descriptive research, unlike assessment and evaluation, is concerned with the analysis of relationships between nonmanipulated variables, and the development of generalizations from these data. Unlike the experimental method, in which variables are deliberately arranged and manipulated through the intervention of the researcher, in descriptive research variables that exist or have already occurred are selected and observed (Best, 1981).

Participants

The population for the study was the 8th grade PSSA participants within traditional public middle schools in the Philadelphia school district. These students were tested in 2011. The 2010-2011 school year is the most recent for which the Pennsylvania Department of Education published test scores. During that school year, 25 middle schools in the region produced sufficient data for analysis.

The participants in this study consisted of a subsample of the eighth grade English language learner students enrolled in the School District of Philadelphia during the 2010-2011 school year. Participants were selected based on the availability of test scores from two group administered tests: The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and the ACCESS. The sample consisted of eighth grade students who had valid scores on both tests administered.

There are 137,512 K-12 students in the district. The racial makeup of the district is 54.52% African American, 7.83 % Asian/Pacific Islanders, 14.30% Caucasian/Euro-American, 18.56 % Hispanic/Latino/a, 4.59% Multiracial, .189% Native American and .019% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. There are 9,338 students enrolled in grade 8. There are 11,658 English Language Learner Students, 19,210 Students with Disabilities, 4,296 Mentally Gifted Students and 113, 035 Economically Disadvantaged Students. The School District of Philadelphia is staffed by 9,552 teachers. There are also an additional 84 Charter Schools within the school district containing 55,652 students and similar demographics. Charter Schools were not included in the sample population.

Procedures

The eight target schools were selected because they contain the highest populations of English language learners within traditional middle schools in the selected school district. To determine school configuration type, the school district website was utilized. The website provided grade levels for individual schools as well as individual annual reports containing enrollment, percentage of English Language Learners, percentage of special education students, percentage of mentally gifted students, percentage of economically disadvantaged students, and the racial makeup of each individual school. Schools classified as K-8 were not selected. By using this method, the overall configuration of schools was similar.

School Control Variables

Academic achievement is influenced by many factors such as percentage of students, total school enrollment and school classification such as rural, suburban, or urban. This demographic information can be found on the school district's website on the school profile page.

The researcher utilized the school district website to review the configuration of schools containing grade eight students. Eight traditional public middle schools were selected because the contained the greatest numbers of English language learners in the district. A proposal was submitted to the school district in an effort to obtain data for all 8^{th} grade students at these schools. The school district released a total sample data set of 1963 individual students, from eight traditional public middle schools, coded with faux ID numbers. The school

district website provided data related to enrollment and student demographics for each school. The academic achievement variables are as follows: the 2011 PSSA reading, math and writing scaled scores, the 2011 ACCESS scaled scores for composite, comprehension, listening, literacy, oral, reading, speaking and writing.

Academic Achievement Data

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) was taken by nearly all Pennsylvania students in math and reading in grades three through eight and grade eleven. The changes between schools' PSSA math and reading scores, the percentage of change for students scoring in each quartile i.e. advanced, proficient, basic and below basic are used to determine levels of academic achievement. Comparisons were made using the PSSA data and ACCESS assessment data for all students in the sample.

The sample, for the study consisted of, grade 8 English language learner students that were administered both the PSSA and ACCESS assessments. Students receiving a scaled score at or above 1310 on the 2011 8th grade PSSA are considered to be scoring at proficient levels, according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. PSSSA scores were compared to student ACCESS levels to determine whether there is a relationship between student performance levels on these two assessments. Assessment scores were compared across subgroups using Pearson correlations and t tests.

A frequency, range, mean and standard deviation was calculated for each of the variables of the study. Pearson correlations were used to determine the relationship between the tests and the variables. Comparisons were made

between the PSSA scaled scores for reading, math and writing tests as well as the ACCESS data. ACCESS scaled scores were analyzed in the following areas: composite, comprehension, listening, literacy, oral, reading, speaking, and writing.

Materials/Measures Needed for the Current Study

SPSS Statistical Software

This software program was used to conduct all the intended analyses. As a statistical instrument SPSS provides a powerful set of sophisticated univariate and multivariate analysis techniques to fit the inherent characteristics of data describing complex relationships.

Review of Records

A review of records was conducted to identify any strands that would support the goals of the study. While reviewing the Language Policy of the School District of Philadelphia, the researcher found the Proficiency Level Scores in the four individual domains and combinations of domains offer a profile of student performance. The Can Do Descriptors and English Language Proficiency standards are used to determine the most appropriate instructional strategies for English language learners. As of July 2010, the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the School District of Philadelphia report ESOL Program Exit Criteria for students in Grade 8 as follows: An ACCESS composite score of 4.7-4.9 and Proficient or better on the PSSA, and a C or better in the four major subjects of English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Otherwise,

a student with a composite score of 5.0 on the ACCESS assessment must score Basic or better on the PSSA, and have a C or better in four major subjects.

The PSSA Test

The PSSA is a standards-based and criterion-referenced test. The four criteria descriptors are in performance categories advanced, proficient, basic and below basic. Beginning in 1999, scaled scores were used to categorize students performance in regard to the Pennsylvania Department of Education academic standards for reading on the PSSA. A scaled score is a transformed number correct score used to produce a more general result (www.pde.state.pa.us).

The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment is a state-wide test administered as required under the chapter for regulations of the State Board of Education. The test is designed to assess the academic levels of students as well as schools and school districts. The PSSA is supposed to assist in identifying their strengths and weaknesses and foster improvements in academic achievement. The basis of the PSSA is the content contained in Pennsylvania's academic standards in reading, writing, speaking, and listening and mathematics.

The Pennsylvania System of State Assessments (PSSA) is a series of criterion-referenced tests in the areas of mathematics, reading, writing and science. These tests are based on academic standards that describe what each student should know and be able to do. These assessments are given to students in grades three through eight and eleven throughout Pennsylvania public schools. The exception is in science where the assessment is given to grades four, eight and eleven. The Pennsylvania Department of Education's website provides

school level scores for these various tests. These tests are aligned with the federal No Child Left Behind Act and are based on content standards set by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Sanctions may be imposed on schools based on measurements of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This measure represents a percentage of students demonstrating proficiency or advanced standing on the math and reading PSSA tests. According to federal NCLB guidelines, all students must demonstrate 100% proficiency, in reading and math for all students, by the year 2014. In addition, all schools must meet 95% participation on all exams, required attendance levels, graduation rate and growth for sub-group populations such as economically disadvantaged, English language learners, and students with disabilities. Test targets increase incrementally until the goal reaches 100% of students achieving advanced or proficient scores by 2014 (www.pde.state.pa.us).

With regard to PSSA test results, on June 27, 2012, the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Communications released the following information:

- There are increases in the percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced in Reading and Math in all grades, with the exception of grade 8 Reading.
- 52.3% of district students scored Proficient or Advanced in Reading and 59% scored Proficient or Advanced in Math.
- There were increases in the percent of students scoring Advanced and Proficient in Reading and Math in all groups with the exception of English Language Learners (both subjects) and Asian students (Reading only).

- Asian students had the largest numbers of students scoring Advanced and Proficient in Math at 84.5%. In Reading, Latino students scored the lowest with 46% Proficient or Advanced.
- The percent of English Language Learners scoring Proficient or Advanced decreased from 2010 to 2011 in Reading (2.6 percentage points) and slightly less in Math (1.0 percentage points).
- The percentage of English Language Learners scoring Below Basic increased in both subjects.
- In Reading, Latino/Hispanic students had the highest percentage of students scoring Below Basic. White students had the lowest percentage of students scoring Below Basic in Reading.

These data are relevant because they are the most recent data for the School District of Philadelphia. The data reveals the fact that English Language Learners are lagging behind their peers. In addition, Latino/Hispanic students scored lowest in reading and had the highest percentage of students scoring below basic.

The ACCESS Assessment

The Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learner's (ACCES) is a large-scale English language proficiency assessment given to kindergarten through 12th graders who have been identified as English-language Learners and is given annually for member states to monitor student progress in acquiring academic English

Moderator Variables

The moderator variables chosen for this research included students' gender, grades, special education status, and ethnicity. Requested information related to students' socioeconomic status was unavailable. This information was obtained from the school district's Office of Research and Evaluation.

Research Questions

Specifically, the following research questions are addressed:

1. Is there any relationship between eighth grade English language learners' proficiency on the reading portion of the PSSA and English language learners' ACCESS assessment levels?
2. What is the relationship between PSSA and ELL student grades?
3. Do teacher grades correlate with ACCESS scores?
4. What is the relationship between the demographic variables (Ethnicity, Socioeconomic status (SES), English Language Learner status (ELL), and student with disabilities status (SWD, utilized in determining schools' AYP status, and the ACCESS test.

Validity and Reliability

The quality of an assessment is characterized by its validity and reliability. Validity refers to the appropriateness, quality and usefulness of the inferences a researcher makes. Reliability refers to the consistency of scores or answers from one administration of an instrument to another, and from one set of items to another. PSSA test-reliability estimates ranged from 0.93 to 0.94 for math and from 0.92 to 0.94 for reading in 2002. PSSA scale scores correlated positively with all measures studied including the SAT, CTBS/Terra Nova, California Assessment Test-Version 5, Northwest Evaluation Association Tests (NWEA) and the New Standards Reference Exam (NSRE). Estimates were very similar in 2001 and 2003. The larger number of test items help account for the PSSA's very high reliability estimates (Thacker, Dickinson & Koger, 2004). For the purposes of this study, scaled scores were correlated between the PSSA and ACCESS assessments to compute validity coefficients. These coefficients provide strong evidence for the validity of the PSSA and require additional explanation. Where correlations are high, questions may be raised as to whether the tests are measuring anything different at all, and whether both tests are necessary.

Data Analysis

This study utilized data from several sources. The school district website provided individual school information. The researcher also presented a proposal to the Philadelphia School District requesting specific data to be utilized in answering the four research questions. The school district research evaluation committee approved the data request. The researcher provided the school district with a list of defined variables for both the ACCESS and PSSA. Student level PSSA and ACCESS data files from the 2011 test administrations were provided by the School District of Philadelphia. A data file was uploaded to a file transfer protocol (FTP) site. Individual student data were released, with faux identification numbers, as requested for all 8th grade students at the eight traditional middle schools. Files included student responses and scores as well as demographic information. Files included student level identifiers for the purpose of matching PSSA results with ACCESS results. The study used achievement data from the 2010-1011 school years.

The data for the study were also obtained from these existing sources: The School District of Philadelphia Instructional Management System, The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PSSA data), and the ACCESS assessment data was retrieved from the School District of Philadelphia Instructional Management System. There are four ACCESS assessment language domains including speaking, listening, reading, and writing (www.wida.us).

The sample for the study consisted of 8th grade students in traditional middle schools that participated in both the PSSA and ACCESS assessments.

Standardized achievement test data and background information were obtained for participating students. The categorical variables included gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, African American, Latino, Special Education, and Limited English proficiency status. Type of language proficiency background will vary depending on English language proficiency status.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Chapter IV presents the results of the study. The major objective of the analyses presented in this chapter is to examine the relationship of eighth grade students' language proficiency as measured by the ACCESS, and achievement test outcomes as measured by the PSSA. Where relevant, results for ELL students will be compared to results for Non-ELL students. The research questions were formulated around the debate over the relationship between English language proficiency, the ACCESS and PSSA assessments. There have been many individual research studies on the assessment of ELL students. The questions for the study resulted from witnessing specific educational decisions made on behalf of English language learners during the period from 2004-2009 in one urban school district in Pennsylvania.

The following research questions are addressed

1. Are there significant relationships between eighth grade English language learners' scores on the PSSA and their scores on the ACCESS?
2. Are there significant relationships between PSSA scores and student grades? Do these relationships differ for ELL students as compared to Non-ELL students?
3. Are there significant relationships between teacher grades and ACCESS scores?

4. Are there significant relationships between the demographic variables of gender, ethnicity, English Language Learner status (ELL), and student with disabilities status (SWD), and the ACCESS scores?

Before the results are presented, a comment is in order about the way the results will be presented. There are two primary statistical tests that will be used to analyze the data: Pearson correlations and Multiple Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). Since the total number of correlations computed for this study is large it is important to remember that some of them will be statistically significant by chance. Two corrections have been applied to handle this problem. First, the alpha level for determining if a correlation is significant has been reduced to .01. Second, the emphasis in interpretation will focus on the effect size rather than statistical significance. For Pearson correlations, the simplest measure of effect size is the correlation squared. While there is no universal consensus on standards for this metric, the following table is used in many standard statistics text books:

r^2	
.01 to .03	Small
.031 to .05	Medium
.051 to .08	Medium to large
.081 and above	Large

In terms of MANOVA, the most commonly reported measure of effect size is termed “partial eta squared”. The standards for this statistic are identical to the standards for a correlation squared as presented above. Where relevant, the

effect size will be reported for all statistical tests employed. Overall, the major focus will be on the pattern and consistency of the results and their practical importance for educational decision making.

The chapter will be presented in four sections. Section I provides descriptive data on the students and the schools sampled for the research. Section II includes the analyses used to answer the major research questions. Section III contains some additional analyses used to extend and elaborate the results relevant to the major research questions. Finally, section IV will provide a summary of the results.

I. Descriptive Statistics

Tables 4-1, 4-2a and 4-2b present a summary of the demographic data included in the PSSA and ACCESS files. Descriptive statistics on the students used for the current study are contained in Table 4.1. The data are disaggregated by the schools used for the study. Data on the PSSA and ACCESS performance of the students are contained in Table 4.2. Since the PSSA data are available for all of the students, while the ACCESS data are only available for ELL students, Table 4.2 contains these two sets of scores separately.

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F	School G	School H	Total
Number of Students	422	210	240	172	192	28	198	494	1956
Gender:									
Male	210	107	117	80	97	14	93	242	948
Female	198	85	115	63	83	13	95	231	895
Missing	14	18	8	29	12	1	10	21	113
Ethnicity:									
Af. Am.	79	54	67	54	155	10	122	180	719
Asian	74	1	23	1	15	9	29	98	250
Hispanic	48	134	123	63	6	6	27	99	506
White	194	2	12	24	4	2	6	77	321
Other	13	1	6	1	0	0	4	19	44
Missing	14	18	8	29	12	1	10	21	113
LEP Status:									
Existed	81	21	36	13	16	6	31	73	277
No ESOL	16	26	13	12	4	1	30	33	135
Served	33	55	33	27	25	3	19	45	240
Unserved	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	2
None	292	108	157	120	147	18	117	343	1302

Table 4-1: Descriptive Data by School

It is important to note that at the time of this writing School F was being converted to a charter school. According to the annual report, very few data were available for this school. School F is located in South Philadelphia. Ninety percent of the 389 students were economically disadvantaged. The percentage of ELL students was unavailable. School A contains a large number of white students. The school is located in Northeast Philadelphia. Fifty-seven percent of the students were economically disadvantaged. Eight percent of the twelve hundred students were English Language Learners.

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F	School G	School H	Total
Number of Students	422	210	240	172	192	28	198	494	1956
PSSA Math	1521.36	1139.99	1270.98	1208.69	1243.64	1334.68	1324.32	1378.26	1337.16
PSSA Reading	1549.75	1152.40	1258.12	1199.77	1283.80	1363.26	1395.95	1385.23	1354.64
PSSA Writing	1428.32	1078.03	1158.66	1115.00	1190.46	1146.92	1338.89	1286.63	1259.37

Table 4-2a: PSSA Data by School (Data in Table are means)

	School A	School B	School C	School D	School E	School F	School G	School H	Total
Number of Students	33	56	35	32	25	3	19	46	249
Access Composite	375.42	348.71	353.17	353.38	360.36	368.00	368.05	362.74	358.95
Access Comprehension	377.88	349.02	354.31	358.44	365.12	369.33	368.47	370.65	362.14
Access Listening	394.88	357.66	370.17	376.78	376.00	383.33	379.42	378.00	374.38
Access Literacy	364.70	343.23	345.54	347.28	354.68	357.33	362.84	357.70	352.41
Access Oral	401.39	362.18	371.57	368.47	374.48	393.33	380.53	375.52	374.98
Access Reading	370.39	345.36	347.37	350.53	360.36	363.33	363.89	367.54	356.86
Access Speaking	407.39	366.14	372.46	360.36	372.48	403.00	381.26	372.41	375.09
Access Writing	358.48	340.70	343.20	343.47	348.44	350.33	361.47	347.30	347.46

Table 4.2b: ACCESS Data by School (Data in Table are means)

A one-way MANOVA was used to compare the schools on the data presented in Table 4.2a and Table 4.2b. For Table 4.2a, the MANOVA was highly significant with a large effect size (Wilks Lambda = .692, p = .000, partial eta squared = .106). For the data in Table 4.2b the results were similar (Wilks lambda = .690, p = .000, partial eta squared = .117). There were significant differences among the schools on all of the variables. In general, the pattern of the means indicated that School B, School C and School D scored significantly lower than the other schools. School F was not included in the analysis since there were only 28 students with PSSA data three students with ACCESS data.

II: Analyses for the Major Research Questions

Measurement scales for the two tests are different when comparing mean scores for two distinct tests. Testing systems estimate student ability and transfer

data. For example, scale scores on the PSSA and ACCESS may look different, but represent equivalent ability. Tables 4-3 thru 4.8b include mean scores, correlations, group distribution and frequencies for the PSSA and ACCESS assessments.

When student data was matched, correlation matrices were constructed to answer the research questions. Each table represents a correlation matrix. Where possible, subject test components are included in the same table.

Question 1: Is there a relationship between eighth grade English language learners' scores on the PSSA and their scores on the ACCESS?

To answer the first research questions, Pearson correlations were computed between the PSSA scores and ACCESS scores. These correlations are presented in Table 4-3.

ACCESS Composite	Correlation with PSSA Reading (n = 212)	Correlation with PSSA Math (n = 237)	Correlation with PSSA Writing (n = 193)
Total Battery	.694	.585	.678
Comprehension	.713	.583	.621
Listening	.544	.444	.477
Literacy	.735	.613	.683
Oral	.521	.458	.529
Reading	.718	.591	.614
Speaking	.419	.403	.486
Writing	.593	.498	.604

Note: All correlations are significant at the .001 level

Table 4.3 Pearson Correlations between PSSA and ACCESS Scores

As demonstrated in Table 4.3, the PSSA scores correlate significantly with all of the components of the ACCESS; all of the effect sizes are large. The results of this analyses strongly suggest a correlation between PSSA and ACCESS scores. This is meaningful because the effect size is large. All values are .10 or greater.

Question 2: Is there a relationship between eighth grade learners' PSSA scores and teacher grades? Do these relationships differ between ELL students and Non-ELL students?

The Pearson correlations between PSSA scores and teacher grades are presented in Table 4.4a and 4.4b. For this analysis, the data have been disaggregated by ELL status.

	Mathematics Grade	Reading Grade	Algebra Grade
PSSA Math	.695 (n = 530)	.529 (n = 530)	.565 (n = 36)
PSSA Reading	.630 (n = 505)	.525 (n = 505)	.439 (n = 36)
PSSA Writing	.550 (n = 483)	.495 (N = 483)	.442 (n = 36)

Note: All of the correlations are significant at the .001 level.

Table 4.4a: Correlations between PSSA Scores and Teacher Grades (ELL Students)

	Mathematics Grade	Reading Grade	Algebra Grade
PSSA Math	.628 (n = 1283)	.506 (n = 1296)	.728 (n = 118)
PSSA Reading	.542 (n = 1292)	.523 (n = 1295)	.623 (n = 118)
PSSA Writing	.501 (n = 1265)	.502 (n = 1268)	.526 (n = 117)

Note: All of the correlations are significant at the .001 level.

Table 4.4b: Correlations between PSSA Scores and Teacher Grades (Non-ELL Students

As shown in Tables 4.4a and 4.4b the PSSA correlates significantly with teacher grades. The correlations are at approximately the same level for ELL students as for non-ELL students.

Question 3: Are there significant relationships between eight grade students' teacher grades and ACCESS scores?

The correlations between ACCESS scores and teacher grades are presented in Table 4.5. Since there were too few grades for Algebra, these correlations are not included in the table.

ACCESS Composite	Correlations with Math Grades (n = 238)	Correlations with Reading Grades (n = 241)
Total Battery	.411**	.272**
Comprehension	.400**	.271**
Listening	.291**	.154*
Literacy	.462**	.371**
Oral	.288**	.118
Reading	.417**	.314**
Speaking	.244**	.072
Writing	.410**	.353**

** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Table 4.5: Correlations between ACCESS Scores and Teacher Grades

As shown in Table 4.5, teacher grades generally correlate with ACCESS scores. All of the correlations with the math grade are significant at the .01 level. For reading, this is true for all of the components of the ACCESS except for Listening (where the correlation is only significant at the .05 level) and for the Oral and Speaking composites (where the correlations are not significant).

Question 4: Are there significant relationships between eighth grade students' demographic variables of gender, ethnicity, English Language Learner status (ELL), and student with disabilities status (SWD), and the ACCESS scores?

To answer this question, analyses were computed to compare performance on the PSSA and ACCESS measures among students from varying backgrounds. It is important to examine whether specific groups show mean differences, and whether those differences are larger for the PSSA than the differences observed on other measures of student achievement. First, effect size statistics were calculated for the differences between major categories of students. MANOVAs were run for each of the demographic variables listed above. Each of these is presented below:

Gender: The overall F test comparing males to females across the various components of the ACCESS was not significant. There was one univariate comparison that was significant: males had significantly lower scores than females on the Writing Component. The effect, however, was very small.

Ethnicity: The overall F test comparing the various racial groups was significant with a small to medium effect size ($F = 1.596$, $p = .020$, partial eta squared = .053). The means for ACCESS by racial group are presented in Table 4.6.

ACCESS Component	White (n = 22)	African American (n = 32)	Hispanic (n = 124)	Asian (n = 48)	Other (n = 12)
Total	374.55	364.56	352.31	365.35	358.33
Comprehension	378.09	370.38	354.85	368.54	360.17
Listening	395.73	382.53	366.78	378.60	361.67
Literacy	363.27	358.13	346,44	359.60	353.33
Oral	401.64	380.63	366.69	379.54	370.25
Reading	370.59	365.09	349.73	364.08	359.67
Speaking	406.95	378.16	366.07	379.96	378.42
Writing	355.32	350.59	342.70	354.58	346.83

Table 4.6: ACCESS Means by Racial Group

Significant differences were found on all of the scales of the ACCESS. The post hoc test indicated that Hispanic students had significantly lower scores on Reading, Literacy, Comprehension and Writing compared to the other racial groups. Overall, the multivariate ordering of the groups is: White> Asian> African American> Other> Hispanic.

Disability Status: Because of restrictions in sample size the ELL students were divided into three groups: SLD, all other disabilities, and no disability. The overall difference between the groups was significant with a small to medium effect size ($F = 1.705$, $p = .043$, partial eta squared = .056). The means for the ACCESS test by these three categories are presented in Table 4.7.

ACCESS Component	SLD (n = 13)	All other Disabilities (n = 10)	No Disability (n = 215)
Total	343.23	355.70	360.05
Comprehension	343.08	358.20	363.45
Listening	354.31	373.50	374.88
Literacy	333.62	345.20	354.06
Oral	366.31	380.90	374.77
Reading	338.31	351.80	358.50
Speaking	377.69	387.80	374.13
Writing	328.62	338.20	349.11

Table 4.7: ACCESS Means by Disability Status

Significant differences between the groups were found for Literacy, Reading and Writing. In all three cases, the Non Disability group had significantly higher scores than the other two groups. It should be mentioned that the small sample sizes for the two disability groups makes this analysis problematic.

English Language Learner Status:

All of the previous analyses have treated the LEP students as one group. Within this group, however, there are distinctions regarding the student's LEP level. These 6 groupings are:

Beginning
Bridging
Developing
Entering
Expanding
Reaching

To ascertain if this variable affected the ACCESS scores, a MANOVA was conducted. The overall F was highly significant with a large effect size (F = 6.669, p = .000, partial

eta squared = .119). Since there was only one student who was classified as "reaching", only the prior five groups were included in the analysis. The means for ACCESS by these groups are contained in Table 4.8.

ACCESS Component	Beginning (n = 50)	Bridging (n = 9)	Developing (n = 77)	Entering (n = 54)	Expanding (n = 47)
Total	347.44	397.56	367.90	327.83	383.96
Comprehension	350.84	403.78	369.90	331.09	387.98
Listening	356.76	426.22	389.08	323.91	412.55
Literacy	341.96	384.89	357.25	333.37	371.11
Oral	361.06	427.33	393.34	315.67	414.85
Reading	348.32	394.22	361.47	334.17	377.38
Speaking	364.72	428.00	396.92	306.94	416.66
Writing	335.08	375.22	352.53	332.07	364.40

Table 4.8: ACCESS Means by LEP Level

A plot of the means for the total score (which is identical to the plot for the other ACCESS scores) is presented in Figure 5-1.

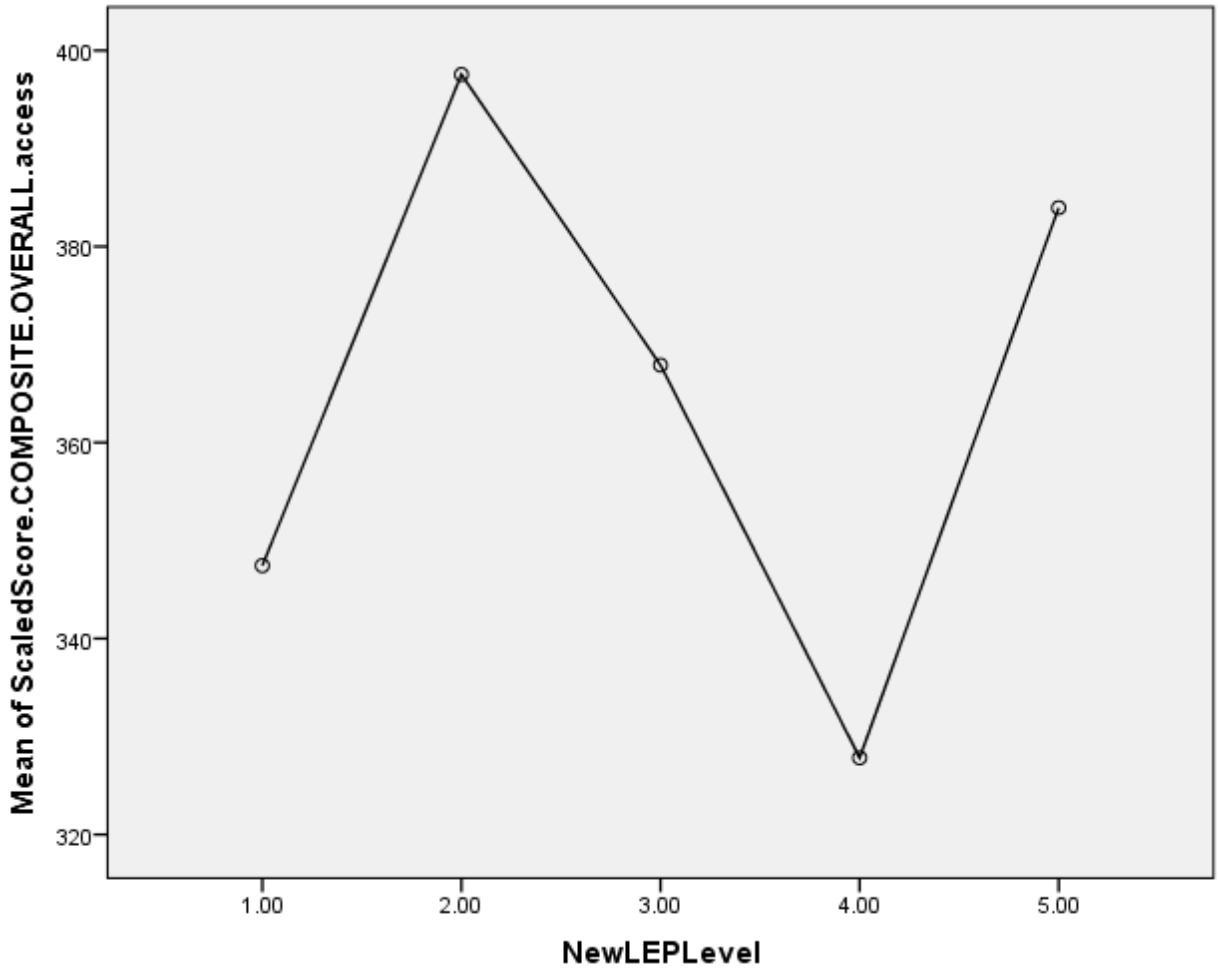

Figure 5-1: ACCESS Composite by LEP Level

Section III: Secondary Analyses

The results presented in this section are intended to extend and elaborate the results presented for the major research questions. Each section is introduced by the question being asked.

Secondary Question # 1: Is there a relationship between a student's status in reading and writing on the PSSA as defined by the four-group classification system used by the State and ACCESS scores?

The State of Pennsylvania classifies students into four groups based on their performance on the PSSA. These groups are Below Basic, Basic, Proficient and Advanced. The relationship between this way of looking at the PSSA and ACCESS scores is presented below. Descriptive data on the entire sample and then separately for the ELL students are presented in Tables 4.8a and 4.8b.

	Writing		Reading	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Below Basic	37	2.6%	420	29.6%
Basic	439	30.9%	287	20.2%
Proficient	767	54.0%	337	23.7%
Advanced	127	8.9%	288	20.3%
Missing	51	3.6%	89	6.3%

Table 4.8a: Group Distribution for Non-ELL Students (N = 4121)

	Writing		Reading	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Below Basic	30	5.6%	174	32.5%
Basic	159	29.7%	86	16.1%
Proficient	281	52.5%	115	21.5%
Advanced	35	6.5%	108	20.2%
Missing	30	5.6%	52	9.7%

Table 4.8b: Group Distribution for ELL Students (N = 535)

All of the ACCESS scores were analyzed as a function of Reading Group and Writing Group. All of these analyses were significant with large effect sizes. Plots of the data are presented in Figures 5-2 and 5-3.

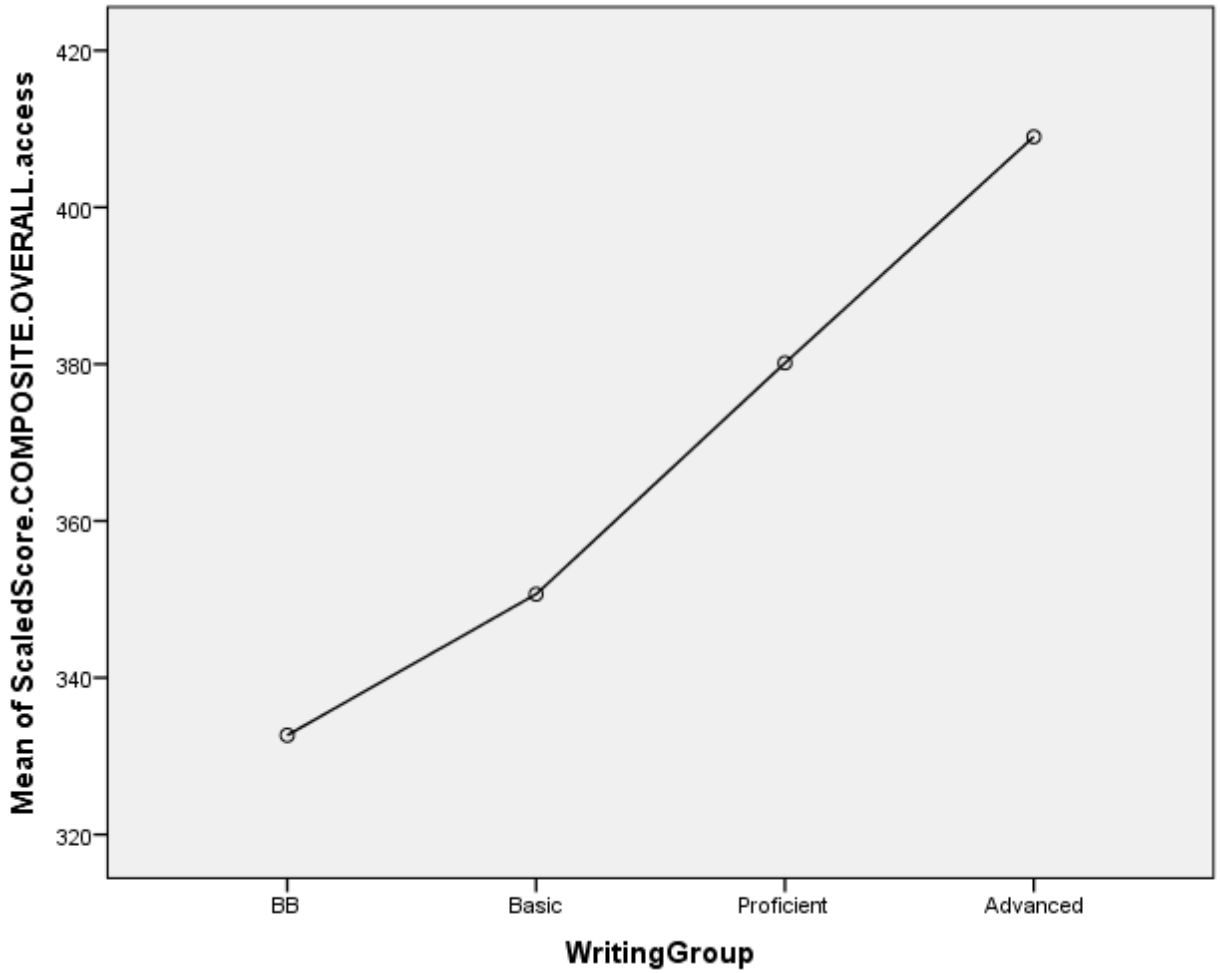

Figure 5-2: Composite ACCESS score by Writing Group

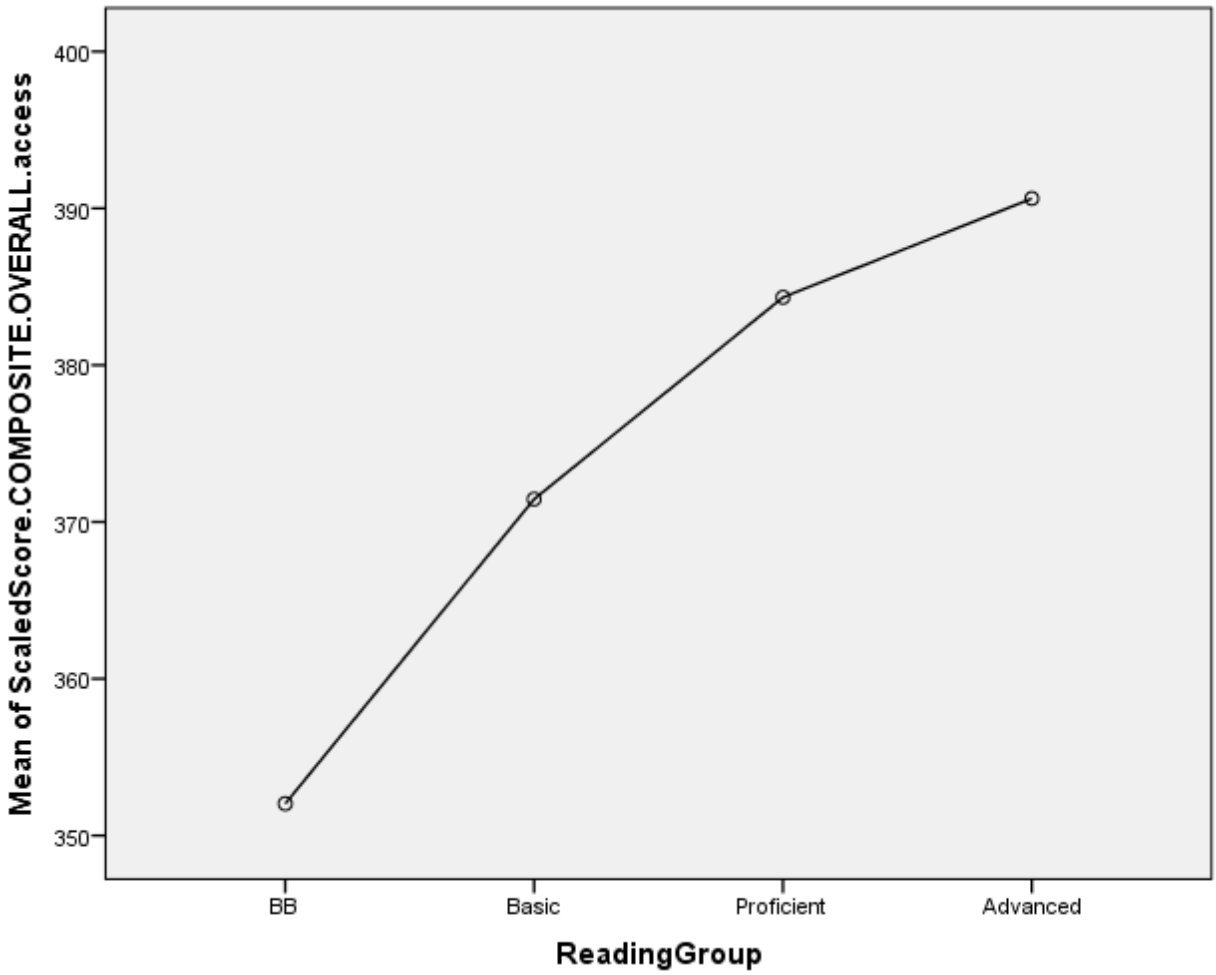

Figure 5-3: Composite ACCESS Score by Reading Group

Essentially these data are identical to the correlational data presented above. That is, as the PSSA increases, so do the ACCESS scores.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

The primary objective of the study was to examine the relationship between students' PSSA scores and those same students' scores on the ACCESS assessment. The ACCESS did highly correlate with the PSSA. Strong evidence was presented for the validity of the PSSA. In addition, demographic factors were analyzed to determine whether there were differences based on gender, ethnicity, disability status, or ELL status.

Several different analyses were run to assess the hypotheses of the present study. First, a one-way MANOVA was used to compare individual school data. Numerous analyses were also run to determine whether there were significant differences among the student achievement test data. Four Pearson Correlations were conducted. Each test was analyzed using composite scores, teacher grades, ELL student status, racial group, student disability status and proficiency level. In addition, two charts displaying the Means of Scaled ACCESS scores for writing and reading were run to determine patterns between Limited English Proficiency levels and ACCESS composite scores.

For question four, MANOVAs were computed for each of the demographic variables by gender and race. An overall F test comparing males and females across the ACCESS components revealed that males had significantly lower scores than females on the Writing Component. However, the effect size was small. Statistically significant differences were found in all areas

except Algebra teacher grades, as there were too few grades to include in the table. For reading, correlations were significant in all components of the ACCESS test except for listening, oral and speaking.

It is important to interpret these results with caution, however. Because this research used data from one school year, long term trends have not been analyzed. Upon reviewing the literature in this study, it is clear there is great variability in individual school programming, support and resources. Recognizing that school fluctuations exist, it is important to consider other facts relevant to this study. Therefore, the results from this study are not generalizable.

Conclusions

The current study intended to answer four research questions:

1. Is there any relationship between eighth grade English language learners' proficiency on the reading portion of the PSSA and English language learners' ACCESS assessment levels? Pearson correlations showed that there was a significant relationship with PSSA reading as well as other PSSA scores.

2. What is the relationship between PSSA and ELL student grades? An analyses of the four different performance levels and ACCESS composite scores revealed that as the PSSA scores increased, so did the ACCESS scores.

3. Do teacher grades correlate with ACCESS scores? In general, teacher grades do correlate with ACCESS scores.

4. What is the relationship between the PSSA demographic variables (Race, Socioeconomic status (SES), English Language Learner status (ELL), and student with disabilities status (SWD), utilized in determining schools' AYP status, and the ACCESS test?

Gender: There were two significant differences between males and females: PSSA Writing and ACCESS writing. In both cases, males had significantly lower scores.

Ethnicity: There were significant differences on all of the variables. A discriminate function analysis, which creates a comparison of groups, was run and showed that the rank order of performance for ethnic groups on both assessments was as follows: White, Asian, African American, Other, Hispanic. The major variables that discriminated among these groups were PSSA Math, PSSA Reading, PSSA Writing and ACCESS Reading.

Disability: There were significant differences on most of the variables by disability. None of the gifted students had ACCESS students. For PSSA, the next highest group was students with no disability. For the ACCESS data, where there were no significant differences, in general, the students without a disability had higher scores.

Discussion

Recent legislation mandating the inclusion of English language learners in state assessments should be implemented by providing reliable, valid and fair assessments for all. The study used data to compare the relationship between grade eight English language proficiency as measured by the ACCESS for Ell's assessment (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for English Language Learners) and achievement test outcomes on the Pennsylvania System of Student Assessment, a state mandated test.

The study also sought to quantify a correlation between language background proficiency and outcomes of 8th grade PSSA and ACCESS test scores for English language learners and school grades. The sample included 8th grade PSSA participants within traditional public middle schools in the Philadelphia school district. These students were tested during the 2010-2011 school year. The 2011 data are the most recent for which the Pennsylvania Department of Education published test scores. Measures included ACCESS and PSSA data previously collected.

Due to the No Child Left Behind Act, there is tremendous pressure placed upon Pennsylvania public school students to perform at certain levels of academic achievement in math and reading in grades three through eight and eleven. This mandate of 100% proficiency in reading in math is for all student subgroups including ELL students. Writing and science are also assessed in Pennsylvania but only math and reading are counted toward Annual Yearly Progress targets.

The AYP measure is directly connected to funding and punitive measures placed upon public schools by the state. There are multiple ways of determining academic achievement. However, the PSSA exam is the way all Pennsylvania public schools are held accountable. Because all students in grades three through eight and eleven are required to take the PSSA math and reading exams, this measure of academic achievement was chosen for this study.

Federal policy for English language learners began with the Bilingual Education Act in 1968. By 2002, and after five reauthorizations, the original principles of the BEA were no longer present in the federal educational law. Currently, English language learners generally perform lower than non-ELL students on reading, science and math assessments. However, ELL students are required to take assessments in a language in which they are not yet proficient. This encourages English only instruction.).

Overall, the literature presented in Chapter 2 indicated that the ACCESS assessment does show a significant relationship with the PSSA. Evidence provided in the current study suggests that either of the group administered tests can be used to analyze the relationship between language background proficiency and academic achievement, as well as grades. These correlations are consistent with much of the existing literature. For example, data obtained in the current study run consistent with data reported by the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Communications, on June 27, 2012:

- There were increases in the percent of students scoring Advanced and Proficient in Reading and Math in all groups with the exception of English

Language Learners (both subjects) and Asian students (Reading only).

- The percent of English Language Learners scoring Proficient or Advanced decreased from 2010 to 2011 in Reading (2.6 percentage points) and slightly less in Math (1.0 percentage points).
- The percentage of English Language Learners scoring Below Basic increased in both subjects.

One assumption underlying the No Child Left Behind act is that all students will be proficient in basic academic skills (reading and math) by the 2013-2014. The expectation is that all students will perform to at least a basic level of proficiency. It is important for policymakers and practitioners to understand, with data, the relationship between English language proficiency and achievement test outcomes. The demographic data presented in the study revealed significant differences on all of the variables. For the purposes of the current study, the descriptive data revealed that of the eight schools analyzed, those schools containing the largest numbers of ELLs (B, C and D), also contained the largest numbers of Hispanic students. Comparing the schools ACCESS scores, revealed that Schools B, D and F perform significantly worse than the other schools. However, School E was eliminated since there were only three students with data for this analysis. In November 2011, the School District of Philadelphia reported School B's students as being 21% ELL, 94.5% Economically Disadvantaged and 69% Hispanic. School C was reported as 18% ELL, 90.3% Economically Disadvantaged and 60% Hispanic. At the time of this writing, data for the 2011 school year for School D were unavailable as School D has now been turned over to a charter school operator. However, the 2010 annual report revealed School D as

being 9.1% ELL, 51.4% Hispanic and 93.7% Economically Disadvantaged. In the current study, School H also contained a large number of ELLs (10%) 23% were reported as being Hispanic and 73.7% were reported as being Economically Disadvantaged in 2011. Economically disadvantaged refers to the percentage of students who receive free lunch and is a common measure of student poverty in educational research.

There are many issues threatening the validity of inferences based on test data such as testing ELL students in English and generalizing from a limited sample of schools.

Recommendations

NCLB has increased accountability for ELL students. Unfortunately, the law has unintended consequences where some public schools are subjected to punitive measures simply for enrolling a large ELL population. Current research is limited in content and scope, on how to appropriately and fairly include ELL students in accountability systems. However, many states still test ELL students utilizing existing systems that are designed for English speakers. Research findings can help improve the accountability system for these students. Until policy issues are resolved, ELL achievement test scores should not be used to impose sanctions on schools, but rather make diagnostic decisions about how to better support ELL students.

Practitioners and policymakers must examine the validity, authenticity and usefulness of language proficiency tests given the significant relationships existing between the PSSA and ACCESS assessments. The results of this study

provided strong evidence that there is a significant relationship between the PSSA and language background, as measured by the ACCESS assessment.

Validity is critical as educators make inferences about students on the basis of the accuracy of how test scores are interpreted. If an assessment requires too much time or money, or is repetitive it may not be useful. LEP classification categories and language background variables should be considered when assessing ELL students. While gathering student performance data is critical, testing is costly. In addition, a great deal of instructional time is spent on assessments that produced similar data. Policymakers should develop alternative or modified assessments to help LEP students better demonstrate content knowledge. There are multiple measurements and authentic assessments that can be used to determine student progress. These include formative and summative assessments, and classroom data.

As public schools are under increasing pressure to narrow the achievement gap, and the demographic landscape changes, more attention must be given to the needs of ELL students. The study contributes to the research that explores the assessment of ELL students. This population is in need of interventions that assess and help improve academic outcomes. The key fact is English acquisition occurs over time and is influenced by time, quality and type of schooling as well as other conditions. This has implications for how funding, instructional and accountability decisions are made. While making recommendations to address the needs of the ELL population is beyond the scope of this study, it offers suggestions to educators and policy makers regarding how to better serve this

population. It can also remind educators of the importance of exploring each individual subgroup's unique needs. In order to improve outcomes for ELL students, additional research in this area would lead to improved educational policies, both nationally and at state levels.

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APPENDIX

ABBREVIATIONS

ACCESS…….…….Accessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State

AYP……..…….……..Adequate Yearly Progress

BEA……...……..Bilingual Education Act

ELL……..……English Language Learner

ESEA…….……..…Elementary and Secondary Education Act

LEP……..…….Limited English Proficiency

NCLB…….……...……..No Child Left Behind

PSSA……...……Pennsylvania System of School Assessment

USDE…….……United States Department of Education