

Assessment Systems in Indigenous Contexts: Webinar Q&A

This Q&A document was compiled following the webinar hosted by REL Pacific on March 15, 2023. The questions below were asked during the live webinar and in the week following the webinar.

Webinar description: Research shows that Indigenous students benefit from culturally responsive and culturally sustaining education, but assessment is not always at the forefront of these conversations. In this REL Pacific webinar, Dr. Sharon Nelson-Barber, with practitioner panelists from Hawai'i and North Dakota, shared their experiences and considerations at different levels of the education system for moving toward assessment systems that better support and highlight the skills and knowledge of Indigenous students.

Question: Are you [at Kamakau] measuring oral proficiency in both Hawaiian language and English?

Answer from Lani Kameha'ililani Waiau:

No, just Hawaiian. [As Kamakau is a Hawaiian language immersion school, we don't assess]... how well they can speak English. Once they leave our campus or once they leave their family's compound, they get assessed on English all the time... So, no. I wonder if I should – that would be interesting though. That would be a smart piece to add eventually if we have capacity, but not currently, no.

Question: How long will the link/recording be available?

Answer from Betsy Callaway:

The recording will go up on our website (<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/region/pacific>) in a few weeks. Please keep checking our site!

Question: Lani, do you use a platform/app that you created for assessing your Indigenous language?

Answer from Lani Kameha'ililani Waiau:

We have spent three years training a hui of five teachers and administrators at Kamakau to use and administer Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI).

Question: Do folks know about school assessments in urban Indigenous contexts where there might be more than one Indigenous language/protocol spoken and taught?

Answer from Scott Simpson:

I'm not directly aware of assessments being implemented in that setting. It sounds like a wonderful thing to look in to though. Great question!

Answer from Lani Kameha'ililani Waiau:

Oh, great question. I am not aware of any.

Answer from Sharon Nelson-Barber:

I know that the Center for Applied Linguistics' oral language assessment model was developed for multiple language groups. In a Native teacher ed program that included Diné and Mojave speakers, the Mojave teachers created their own assessments, separate from those for Diné.

While there is still much to be developed and shared about Indigenous language assessments, using more than one non-English language for assessments in urban contexts is fairly common. Here are some observations:

- For classroom-based assessments (for example, unit tests, benchmark assessments, etc.), programs on their own either purchase or develop assessments in whatever languages other than English (LOTE) are used during instruction. I know this is a big challenge for dual language programs because there are not a lot of "off the shelf" curricula or assessments available in LOTEs (particularly non-Spanish languages), and this is a frustration I hear expressed in the field.
- For large-scale standardized assessments used for accountability, states are allowed to test students in a LOTE but the assessment must go through the same peer review process used for English tests, and also must be shown to be comparable to the English version of the assessment. Relatively few states pursue this, and those that do are almost entirely using Spanish assessments. The Kaiapuni Assessment of Educational Outcomes ([KĀ'EO](#)) is an example of an Indigenous language (Hawaiian) large-scale standardized assessment that is used for state-level accountability.
- In general, it is best to have the assessment match a student's language of instruction. If students are learning science in Mandarin, they will likely do better on science tests in Mandarin than in English. If a student speaks Mandarin at home but is taught in English at school, they will not necessarily do better if they are assessed in their home language. It is not a given that a student's technical or academic language or knowledge in one language will transfer to another (for example, I am very good at French, but I have no idea how to say "lowest common denominator" in that language, because I have never taken math in French). In contexts where students are tested in English on the summative test at the end of the year, they might still end up being tested in both English and the LOTE during the year, though this is always tough from a cost and time perspective.