

Preface

Standards-Based Instruction and Assessment for English Language Learners was written to promote greater understanding of the significant issues that must be addressed to ensure a high quality education for students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Its purpose is to translate the most important findings from the research literature into policy and practice implications that will be useful to teachers; principals; superintendents; school district personnel responsible for assessment; bilingual, ESL, and Title I program directors; and state education leaders.

Today's education reform initiatives emphasize that *all* students must be held to the same standards for learning, and they must have access to the quality of education necessary to achieve the standards. At the heart of the standards movement is an unprecedented commitment to educate *all* of the nation's children to be effective thinkers, problem solvers, and communicators so they can participate as members of the global community. At the same time, America's classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, and students whose first language is not English are the fastest-growing school population. Known as English language learners (ELLs), these children come from very different backgrounds, and they face a considerable challenge in having to respond to the academic demands of school at the same time that they are working toward English proficiency.

Assessment and instructional practices in American schools were neither created nor designed to be responsive to the range of diversity represented in today's ELL population,

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but current reforms in instruction and assessment are being viewed hopefully as offering more effective strategies for educating English language learners. Nevertheless, of equal concern is that insufficient attention has been given to the cultural and linguistic factors that have an impact on instruction and assessment.

This book presents a comprehensive overview of the hopes and concerns of standards-based instruction and assessment for ELLs and their implications for school policies and practices. Chapter 1 discusses the effects of standards on educational equity and accountability, and the changes in practice that are associated with the emerging culture of standards-based assessment. Key topics in Chapter 2 include population trends and the characteristics of English language learners in America's schools, how language and culture affect learning, and language development issues for ELLs. Chapter 3 discusses a wide range of assessment issues for ELLs, and Chapter 4 provides an in-depth overview of standards-based learning practices for ELLs. The final chapter contains a set of policy and practice recommendations that support a high quality education for English language learners. The three resources provide additional self-assessment surveys and other tools for planning and developing programs and for assessing a school's policies and practices against the indicators of a high-performing school.

School and classroom practices must be consistent with our hopes for children and our vision of achieving both excellence and equity in our education system. Implementing sounder practices for English language learners will require teachers and administrators to make different decisions about instruction and assessment, develop greater awareness of how cultural and linguistic factors impact on learning, and embrace the belief that children from highly diverse backgrounds can learn at high levels. The findings of the researchers whose work is reflected here provide important perspectives that can support the work of teachers and administrators.