



**Evaluation of the
Redesigned Bilingual Assessment Team Process**

**Office of Shared Accountability
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Purpose of Study

In January 2016, MCPS introduced a redesigned referral process for language dominance assessment and special education determination of students who are eligible for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services and may have an educational disability. This process involves referrals to the centrally-based Bilingual Assessment Team (BAT). A key component of the new process is that each student’s ESOL level affects which assessments the student receives and who (i.e., BAT or school staff) administers each one. This study evaluated the redesigned BAT process by addressing two questions: 1) To what extent is the new process being implemented with fidelity and 2) Are the strategies and procedures working to achieve the expected short-term outcomes?

The evaluation included data from during school year 2016–2017. Data sources included records from professional development sessions, interviews with 15 of 23 interpreters trained on formal assessments used during special education evaluations, and information from several MCPS student-level databases

Recommendations

- Provide more training to school-based staff about the redesigned referral process for special education determination of ESOL recipients with a focus on:
 - Referrals and assessments of ESOL level 1 and 2 students.
 - When to use interpreters.
 - Best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients. Explore online training modules as a cost-effective way.
- Provide professional learning opportunities for interpreters about special education assessments, to more interpreters beyond the initial cadre of 25. For the initial cadre, provide detailed training about special education assessments.
- Explore ways to address the burden on interpreters of translating long, reading passages.

Highlights of Study Findings

- Professional learning opportunities on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients were offered. More than 80% of both school psychologists and speech language pathologists attended such sessions, as did 27% of special education teachers from elementary schools.
- Participation was 100% for a selected cadre of 25 interpreters at a session about supporting school staff in assessing students.
- School staff referrals to the BAT team were correct for 84% of 953 students. Referrals were more accurate for ESOL recipients at level 3 and above than for students at ESOL level 1 or 2.
- For 81% of 953 students, school and BAT teams made correct decisions on who should complete assessments, as specified in the redesigned BAT process. Correct decisions were more frequent for ESOL recipients at level 3 and above. See Figure below.
- Schools requested an MCPS interpreter for only about one half of all ESOL recipients that they assessed. Requests for interpreters were more frequent for students who spoke languages other than Spanish or whose primary language was not dominant.
- Interviewed interpreters reported that their training prepared them well for supporting school staff, they were very clear about their role as an interpreter for the purposes of assessment, and they knew well how to support school staff in assessing ESOL recipients.

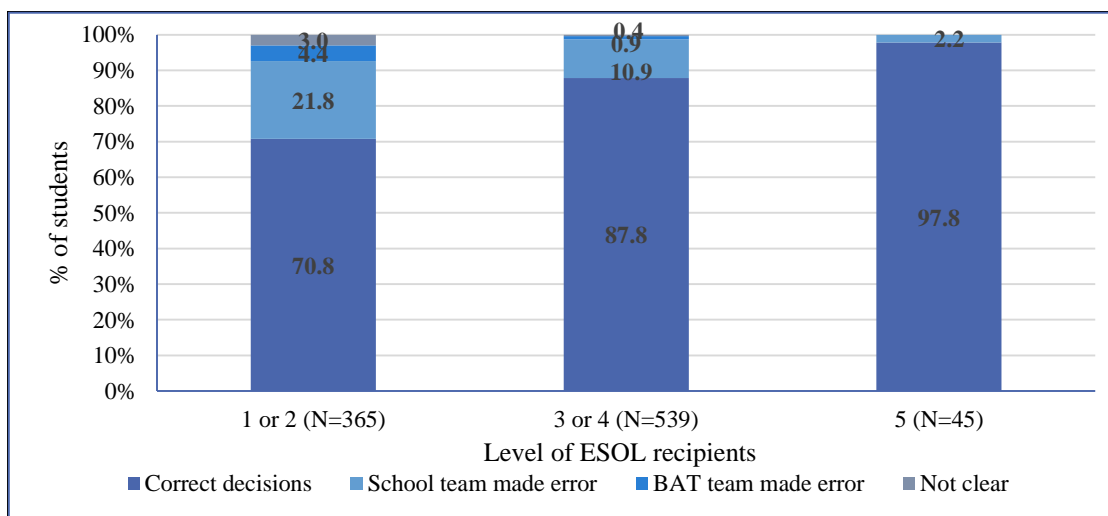


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Executive Summary

In January 2016, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) introduced a redesigned referral process for language dominance assessment and special education determination of students who are eligible for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services and may have an educational disability. This process involves referrals to the centrally-based Bilingual Assessment Team (BAT). A key component of the new process is that each student's ESOL level affects which assessments the student receives and who (i.e., BAT or school staff) administers each one. At the request of the Office of Special Education, the Office of Shared Accountability evaluated the redesigned BAT process, using the following questions:

- 1) To what extent is the new process being implemented with fidelity?
- 2) Are the strategies and procedures working to achieve the expected short-term outcomes?

Summary of Methodology

The evaluation included all MCPS schools during school year 2016–2017. Data sources included records from professional development sessions and interviews with 15 of 23 interpreters who had attended training on formal assessments used during special education evaluations. Also, the evaluators analyzed information from several MCPS student-level databases, including one created by the BAT team with information on which assessments (if any) the school team completed and which assessments (if any) the BAT team completed during 2016–2017; one created by the MCPS Division of ESOL/Bilingual Program with requests for interpretation services during special education meetings at schools; and one with all students who were newly identified to receive special education services in 2016–2017. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the findings for all evaluation questions.

Summary of Findings

To what extent is the new process being implemented with fidelity?

The key input evaluated was professional development. Professional learning opportunities on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients were offered to a variety of staff. More than 80% of both school psychologists and speech language pathologists attended such sessions, as did special education teachers from 80% of elementary schools. Professional learning opportunities for special education teachers in secondary schools are scheduled for 2017–2018. Participation was 100% for a professional development session for a selected cadre of 25 interpreters to support school staff in assessing students.

Are the strategies and procedures working to achieve the expected short-term outcomes?

The first outcome studied was if school staff knew which students to refer to the BAT team. School staff correctly referred 84% of 953 students, suggesting that they were knowledgeable about the referral process. Referrals were more accurate for ESOL recipients at level 3 and above than for students at ESOL level 1 or 2.

The second outcome studied was whether school teams and the BAT team knew for which ESOL recipients they are responsible for completing assessments, as specified in the redesigned BAT process. Out of 953 students, teams made correct decisions on who should complete assessments for 81%. Correct decisions were more frequent for ESOL recipients at level 3 and above than for students at ESOL level 1 or 2. These findings suggested that teams were knowledgeable about who was responsible for completing assessments, especially with respect to ESOL recipients at level 3 and above.

The next outcome examined was if school teams knew when they should use interpreters during assessments. There were requests for an MCPS interpreter for only about one half of all the ESOL recipients that school-based teams assessed, suggesting that school teams were not knowledgeable. Requests for interpreters were more frequent for students who spoke languages other than Spanish and for students whose primary language was not dominant.

The final outcome studied was the extent to which interpreters who attended training on formal assessments used during special education evaluations knew how to support school staff in assessing ESOL recipients. The interviewed interpreters reported that the training prepared them well for supporting school staff, they were very clear about their role as an interpreter for the purposes of assessment, and they knew well how to support school staff in assessing ESOL recipients. Several interviewees requested additional support in the form of training or materials.

Summary of Recommendations

- Provide more training to school-based staff about the redesigned referral process for special education determination of ESOL recipients with a focus on the following topics:
 - *Referrals and assessments of ESOL level 1 and 2 students.* Review when school staff should refer these students to the BAT team and for what assessments.
 - *When to use interpreters.* Explore reasons why school staff do not request interpreters and develop training or other resources to address these reasons. Review with school staff the requirement that their teams must provide an MCPS interpreter whenever they assess whether an ESOL recipient is eligible for special education services. Emphasize this requirement for students with the strongest skills in English, who are those at ESOL level 3 or 4 with English dominance and those at ESOL level 5.
 - *Use of interpreters.* Provide opportunities for more teachers to receive training on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients. Only about one quarter of special education teachers in elementary schools attended such training and no sessions were provided for special education teachers in secondary schools, due to limited resources. Explore online training modules as a cost-effective way to provide such opportunities and to reach more teachers.
- Given the positive reception of the professional learning opportunities for interpreters about special education assessments, provide such opportunities to more interpreters, beyond the initial cadre of 25. For the initial cadre of interpreters, provide additional and detailed professional learning opportunities about special education assessments.
- Explore ways to address the burden on interpreters of translating long, reading passages, perhaps by making it possible for interpreters to receive them prior to the session or by providing the passages already translated.

Evaluation of the Redesigned Bilingual Assessment Team Process

In January 2016, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) introduced a redesigned referral process for assessing students eligible for ESOL services and who are suspected of having an educational disability (Richardson, 2015). The process may include a language dominance assessment and assessments for determining special education eligibility. This process involves referrals to the centrally-based Bilingual Assessment Team (BAT), a unit within the Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement (OSFSE) but formerly in the Office of Special Education (OSE). OSE requested that the Office of Shared Accountability (OSA) evaluate the redesigned BAT process with respect to fidelity of implementation and how well the redesigned process met its intended outcomes.

Background

For students receiving ESOL services, it can be difficult to ascertain whether academic difficulties are due to a lack of proficiency in language acquisition, an educational disability, some combination of those, or some other issue (Keller-Allen, 2006). Further, when a student is learning English, the interplay of language dominance (i.e., first language vs. English), language proficiency and learning, and other challenges increases the complexity of accurately assessing whether the student is eligible for special education services. To address these challenges, members of the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) team at each school work with members of BAT, a multilingual team whose members conduct assessments such as language dominance, psychological, educational, and speech-language for students who receive ESOL services.

The BAT process redesign was initiated because data indicated that among Grade K–2 students in MCPS, ESOL recipients were identified for special education services for language-based learning disabilities at higher rates than non-ESOL recipients. Language-based learning disabilities refer to a spectrum of difficulties related to the understanding and use of spoken and written language. Although numerous factors may affect the over-identification of ESOL students for special education services, the BAT redesign addressed two key factors: inconsistent use of interpreters in the assessment process and variability in assessment practices for culturally and linguistically diverse students. As part of the new process, a newly trained cadre of MCPS interpreters is available to assist school-based staff in completing formal assessments during special education evaluations. Further, the referral process to the BAT unit has been revised and streamlined to expedite delivery of appropriate services and supports to students, and there are changes to how the BAT team and school IEP teams work together, as described below.

Redesigned BAT Process

A key component of the new process is that a student's ESOL level drives the assessments a student will receive, as well as who will administer each assessment. There are four assessments of interest in the BAT process, as follows:

- 1) Language dominance assessments are used to determine the appropriate language(s) for use in testing if the IEP team recommends special education evaluation.

- 2) Educational assessments compare a student’s academic functioning with other students of the same age, usually with a focus on reading, writing, math, and oral language.
- 3) Psychological assessments are measures and techniques used to obtain information useful in the evaluation of student behavior and learning in the school-community setting.
- 4) Speech-language assessments examine communication functioning to determine if there is a speech-language disorder affecting an individual’s functioning for home, school, or the community.

Table 1 summarizes which team (school or BAT) is responsible for administering each of these assessments (if needed).

**Table 1
Responsibility for Completing Assessments in the Redesigned BAT Process**

ESOL level	Language dominance assessment		Responsibility for completing other frequently used assessments		
	Responsibility for completing	Results	Educational	Psychological	Speech-language
1 or 2	None	NA	BAT	BAT	Spanish: BAT All other languages: School team with interpreter
3 or 4	BAT	First language dominance	BAT	BAT	Spanish: BAT All other languages: School team with interpreter
		Mixed language dominance	School team with interpreter	BAT	Spanish: BAT All other languages: School team with interpreter
		English dominance	School team with interpreter	School team with interpreter	School team with interpreter
5	None	NA	School team with interpreter	School team with interpreter	School team with interpreter

For ESOL level 1 or 2 recipients, the school team should refer the student to BAT for all assessments. The only exception is that the school team, with support from an interpreter, is expected to conduct speech-language assessment for ESOL level 1 or 2 recipients who are non-Spanish speaking. The school team, with an interpreter, is responsible for speech-language assessments in languages other than Spanish, because the speech and language pathologists in BAT only speak English and Spanish.

For ESOL level 3 or 4 students, the school team first should refer the student to the BAT team for language dominance assessments. The result of the language dominance assessments determines which team (school or BAT) is responsible for completing which assessment (i.e., educational, psychological, or speech-language), as shown in Table 1. There are three possible outcomes from language dominance assessment, as follows (MCPS, 2017b):

- 1) First language dominance: All testing should be done bilingually. BAT is responsible for educational and psychological assessments, as well as speech-language assessments in Spanish. The school team, with an interpreter, is responsible for speech-language assessments in languages other than Spanish.
- 2) Mixed language dominance: This outcome usually indicates that the student is more competent academically in English than in the first language but the student may

understand and communicate better in the first language. The school team is responsible for conducting the educational assessment in English, while BAT conducts the psychological assessments bilingually or with an interpreter. Speech-language assessments may be completed bilingually or with an interpreter: BAT is responsible for Spanish speakers and the school team with an interpreter is responsible for speech-language assessments for speakers of all other languages.

- 3) English dominance: The school team with an interpreter is responsible for all testing, which should be done in English.

For ESOL level 5 students, the school team with an interpreter is expected to complete all assessments.

In the previous process, the BAT unit conducted language dominance assessments for all ESOL recipients; responsibility (i.e., BAT team or school team) for completing other assessments was determined after the results of those language dominance assessments. The new process has been streamlined for school staff, so that students at ESOL levels 1, 2, and 5 do not receive language dominance assessments; instead the new process indicates which team has responsibility for completing assessments as described above. Under the new process, the BAT unit conducts language dominance assessments only for students at ESOL levels 3 and 4.

The BAT redesign should help achieve two long term goals: 1) to accurately differentiate language differences or deficits from language-based learning disabilities in students who receive ESOL services and 2) to reduce over-identification of ESOL recipients in Grades K–2 for special education services for language-based learning disabilities.

Logic Model

The Logic Model (Figure 1) summarizes the components of the redesigned BAT process.

Inputs

To achieve the goals, there are four key inputs, as follows:

- 1) The first input was the redesigned BAT process for language dominance assessment and special education determination.
- 2) To support the redesign, the second input was the creation of new process maps, checklists, a memo to principals, and narrative descriptions for the redesigned BAT referral process.
- 3) The third input was training and professional development. OSE provided professional learning opportunities on best practices for working with interpreters, when assessing students who receive ESOL services, to selected staff members: psychologists, speech language pathologists, and special education teachers.
- 4) The fourth input also was training and professional development. OSE offered training for a cadre of MCPS interpreters to assist school-based staff when completing formal assessments used during special education evaluations.

Figure 1, Logic model for the redesigned BAT process

Needs and Issues	Inputs from program	Outputs/Results		Expected outcomes		
		Expected activities for staff	Participation metrics	Short term (< 1.5 years)	Medium term (1.5-3 years)	Long term (3 years+)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent use of interpreters in the assessment process • Variability in assessment practices for culturally and linguistically diverse students • Over-identification of ESOL recipients for special education services in grades K–2 for language-based learning disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesigned the BAT process for language dominance assessment and special education determination for K-Grade 12 students • Created process maps, checklists, memo, & narrative descriptions for redesigned BAT referral process • Provided professional learning (PD) opportunities for psychologists, speech language pathologists, and special education teachers on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients • Provided training for a cadre of interpreters to support school staff in assessing students, as appropriate, in selected languages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principals share revised BAT unit referral procedures. (Detailed in Table 1.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % principals who disseminated memo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School teams know under what conditions to refer students to BAT team, when they suspect an educational disability. • School teams know under what conditions they complete assessments for ESOL recipients and under what conditions to use interpreters during assessment. • BAT team knows under what conditions they complete assessments for ESOL recipients. • Interpreters know how to support school staff in assessing selected students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BAT staff members will focus their expertise on selected groups of ESOL recipients, where expertise is most needed. • MCPS will expedite assessments for ESOL recipients in K-Grade 12. • School teams will perceive that they receive timely assessments and recommendations from BAT. • School teams will use interpreters appropriately during assessments. • School teams will be consistent in assessment practices for ESOL recipients, with respect to use of interpreters and use of BAT team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MCPS will accurately differentiate language differences from language-based learning disabilities in students who receive ESOL services. • MCPS will reduce over-identification of ESOL recipients for special education services in Grades K-2 for language-based learning disabilities.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychologists, speech language pathologists and special education teachers attend PD on working with interpreters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # PD sessions offered • # and % of schools with special education teachers who attend PD • # and % of school psychologists and speech language pathologists who attend PD 			
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreters selected (n=25) and attend training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % interpreters (out of 25) attending PD 			

Outputs/Results

If the above-listed inputs are provided, expected results for staff involved are attendance at training by identified staff members and dissemination of the memo about the revised referral process.

Outcomes

If the inputs are provided and if the expected outputs or results occur, three levels of expected outcomes should happen: short-term, medium-term, and long-term (see Figure 1 above).

Short term. The short-term outcomes are that school teams will learn for which ESOL recipients they should do the following: 1) refer the student to the BAT team, when the school team suspects an educational disability, 2) complete assessments for the student, and 3) use interpreters during assessments. School staff should contact the Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs to request an interpreter. BAT team members will know for which ESOL recipients they complete assessments, while interpreters will know how to support school staff in assessing students.

Medium term. If the expected short-term learning occurs, then the medium term outcomes should occur, as follows.

- MCPS will make better use of BAT staff members' expertise by having them focus their expertise on assessments of selected groups of ESOL recipients (i.e., level 1 and 2 recipients, level 3 and 4 recipients with first language or mixed language dominance) and by eliminating language dominance assessments for some groups of ESOL recipients (i.e., level 1, 2, and 5 recipients).
- MCPS will expedite assessments for school-aged ESOL recipients.
- School teams will perceive that they receive timely assessments and recommendations from BAT.
- School teams will understand how to use interpreters during assessments.
- School teams will be consistent in assessment practices for ESOL recipients, with respect to their use of interpreters and their use of BAT team members.

Long-term. If all of the short term and medium term outcomes occur, then this redesigned process should help to achieve its two long term goals: 1) to accurately differentiate language differences or deficits from language-based learning disabilities in students who receive ESOL services and 2) to reduce over-identification of ESOL recipients in Grades K–2 for special education services for language-based learning disabilities.

Literature Review

The challenge of determining whether an ELL's learning struggles are due to a lack of proficiency in English or an educational disability is not unique to MCPS. Shifrer, Muller, and Callahan (2011) concluded that it is difficult to gauge rates and levels of "normal second language acquisition," and a lack of English proficiency is sometimes interpreted as limited intelligence or a disability. Likewise, in districts outside of MCPS, there is evidence that the rates of identification of

disabilities differ between ELLs and native English speakers. Sullivan (2011) studied the extent of disproportionality in the identification and placement of English language learners in special education within one southwestern state; there was evidence that ELLs were more likely than White students (assumed to be native English speakers) to be identified with learning disabilities or mental retardation. She concluded that persistent disproportionality is related to “the construction of difference, educational opportunity, and local context of policy and practice.” (p. 331). Rueda, Artiles, Salazar, and Higareda (2002) analyzed special identification rates in 11 California districts; they found an increase in identification for ELLs starting in Grade 5 and a greater increase starting in secondary school.

Samson and Lesaux (2009) examined data from a broad sample, specifically the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Kindergarten Cohort which originated as a nationally representative sample of more than 22,000 students enrolled in 1,277 kindergarten programs during the 1998–1999 school year. Based on a sample from the Cohort of 2,470 language-minority learners and 8,517 native English speakers, Samson and Lesaux found that language-minority learners were underrepresented in special education in kindergarten and first grade but were overrepresented in third grade, across all disability categories. They proposed several possible reasons why language-minority learners are identified later than their native English speaking peers: federal requirements that special education placement must not be due to language or environmental factors, teachers’ reluctance to refer language-minority learners for special education assessment until students are proficient in English, and teachers’ lack of confidence in identifying disabilities in language-minority students.

As part of an effort to differentiate between problems due to language acquisition versus problems due to learning disabilities, Klingner, Artiles, and Barletta (2006) reviewed studies of assessment practices used with ELLs who potentially had learning disabilities. They found several problems, as follows. In a study of 73 Hispanic children identified with a language learning disability, Maldonado-Colon (1986) found that tests were in English for most students without regard to their home language and that interpretation of results did not take language differences into account. Barrera Metz (1988) also found little impact of information about student’s home language, when analyzing the decisions that the seven psychologists in her study made about assessment processes for Hispanic students.

Klingner, Artiles, and Barletta (2006) noted two additional studies that used data from a survey of 859 members of the National Association of School Psychologists in eight states; the respondents reported prior experience in bilingual psychoeducational assessments. From this data set, Ochoa, Powell, and Robles-Pina (1996) analyzed the use of interpreters; over one half of the psychologists reported using interpreters but only about one third (36%) of the interpreters had received formal training. In a second paper, Ochoa, Rivera, and Powell (1997) determined that the respondents overlooked consideration of the student’s native language and almost never examined whether there was a discrepancy in the student’s home language as well as in English.

Harry, Klingner, and colleagues (Harry & Klingner, 2006; Harry, Klingner, Sturges, & Moore, 2002) also concluded that in assessments of language minority students, there is an overreliance on findings from tests in English, a disregard for results from tests in native languages, and a lack of attention to language acquisition as an alternate explanation for students’ learning struggles.

Evaluation Scope and Questions

The evaluation's scope included implementation and outcomes, with the goal of providing information to help improve the redesigned BAT process. Due to the time frame for data collection, the scope included only outputs and short-term outcomes.

1. To what extent is the new process being implemented with fidelity, as indicated by the participation metrics for:
 - a. Sharing documents for the revised BAT unit referral procedures.
 - b. Training school psychologists, speech language pathologists, and special education teachers on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients.
 - c. Training interpreters.

2. Are the strategies and procedures working to achieve the expected short-term outcomes in the following areas:
 - a. School teams know which ESOL recipients they should refer to the BAT team, when they suspect an educational disability.
 - b. School teams know for which ESOL recipients they are responsible for completing assessments, when they suspect an educational disability.
 - c. BAT team knows for which ESOL recipients they are responsible for completing assessments, when a school team suspects an educational disability.
 - d. School teams know for which ESOL recipients they should use interpreters during assessments.
 - e. Interpreters know how to support school staff in assessing ESOL recipients.

Methodology

Sample

The sample included all MCPS schools, because each one was expected to implement the revised process for students who receive ESOL services and are suspected of having a learning disability.

Data Sources

Evaluation question 1a concerned how many principals shared the documents for the revised BAT unit referral procedures with the appropriate staff at their schools. The deadline for this sharing was January 6, 2016. Because data collection for this evaluation did not start until 18 months later in May 2017, the evaluators decided against surveying principals because of the long time lapse.

The evaluation used a variety of data sources to address the remaining questions, as described below and summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Data Collection Method and Source by Evaluation Question

Evaluation question	Data collection method	Data source
1. To what extent is the new process being implemented with fidelity, as indicated by the participation metrics for:		
b. Training school psychologists, speech language pathologists, and special education teachers on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients.	Attendance records or information	OSE, OSFSE
c. Training interpreters	Attendance records or information	OSE
2. Are the strategies and procedures working to achieve the expected short-term outcomes in the following areas:		
a. School teams know which ESOL recipients they should refer to the BAT team, when they suspect an educational disability.	Student-level databases	BAT team, OSA, OSE
b. School teams know for which ESOL recipients they are responsible for completing assessments, when they suspect an educational disability.	Student-level databases	BAT team, OSA, OSE
c. BAT team knows for which ESOL recipients they are responsible for completing assessments, when a school team suspects an educational disability.	Student-level databases	BAT team, OSA, OSE
d. School teams know for which ESOL recipients they should use interpreters during assessments.	Student-level database of requests for interpreters	Division of ESOL/ Bilingual Program
e. Interpreters know how to support school staff in assessing ESOL recipients.	Interviews	Interpreters

To answer evaluation questions 1b and 1c about professional development that addresses working with interpreters during assessments, the evaluators used attendance records or information provided by OSE and OSFSE on sessions offered for each of the following groups: special education teachers, school psychologists, speech language pathologists, and interpreters.

To answer evaluation question 2a on referrals to the BAT team, the evaluators analyzed information from several MCPS student-level databases, including one created by the BAT team on referrals to their team in 2016–2017 and monthly enrollment databases with information on student’s ESOL levels created by OSA. To help identify students whom schools did not refer, the evaluators used a database from OSE of all students who were newly identified to receive special education services in 2016–2017.

To answer evaluation questions 2b and 2c on responsibility for completing assessments, the evaluators analyzed information from several MCPS student-level databases, including one created by the BAT team with information on which assessments (if any) the school team completed, and which assessments (if any) the BAT team completed during 2016–2017. To identify any students whom schools did not refer to BAT, the evaluators used a database from OSE of all students who were newly identified to receive special education services in 2016–2017.

To answer evaluation question 2d on school team use of interpreters during assessments, the MCPS Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs provided a student-level database of requests for interpretation services during special education meetings at schools.

To answer evaluation question 2e on interpreters’ knowledge of how to support school staff in assessing selected ESOL recipients, one of the evaluators interviewed interpreters in September 2017. The initial sample of interpreters was the 25 who had attended training on formal assessments used during special education evaluations. The interview questions concerned the interpreter’s experiences in supporting school staff during assessments of ESOL recipients and included both closed-response and open-ended questions. Three email invitations to complete an interview went to each interpreter. Out of 25 interpreters who attended training, 23 continued as an MCPS interpreter after the training. Seventeen interpreters agreed to interviews, but two could not be scheduled during the data collection timeframe. The evaluator was able to complete 15 interviews of 15-20 minutes in person or by phone, for a response rate of 65% (15 out of 23).

Analytical Procedures

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the findings for all evaluation questions.

Strengths and Limitations of the Methodology

As noted above, this study does not include any findings on evaluation question 1a that concerned whether principals shared the documents for the revised BAT unit referral procedures with appropriate school staff members. If principals did not, it could explain any weak results with respect to achieving the expected short-term outcomes, as addressed in the findings for evaluation question 2.

To identify as many students as possible for whom the redesigned process applied, two student databases were used. The first database contained students referred to BAT. The second database was students newly identified with a learning disability, some of whom school teams did not refer to BAT. However the second database excluded students who received special education assessments but were not identified with a learning disability. Thus none of the databases included ESOL recipients who were assessed, not referred to BAT and not identified. The impact of this limitation is not clear, because schools do not need to refer all ESOL recipients to BAT.

Instead of relying on staff to self-report attendance at training or referral processes for ESOL recipients, this evaluation relied on data sources that were independent of the staff involved. Further, to verify findings of weak implementation, one of the evaluators verified information for a sample of students by examining the educational evaluation reports for those students. Those results are included with the findings below.

As described below, the data bases used to answer questions 2a, 2b, 2c, and 2d did not assess staff knowledge directly. Instead, the data bases provided information on actions by staff and the evaluators made inferences about staff knowledge, based on their actions. In those cases where the redesigned process matched the previous process (e.g., referrals of ESOL recipients at level 3 or 4 for language dominance assessments to BAT), the correct actions may not indicate knowledge of the new process. Thus the results may overstate the level of knowledge.

The interviews with interpreters provided detailed feedback about the interpretation process. However, the interviews were voluntary and did not include all the interpreters who attended the training; it is not clear if the input from non-interviewees would change the findings. Also, the interviews were not anonymous; interviewees may have given responses that were more desirable or that they thought matched what the interviewer wanted to hear.

Findings

1. To What Extent is the New Process Being Implemented With Fidelity?

Training on Best Practices for Working With Interpreters to Assess ESOL Recipients

One key input was professional learning opportunities for psychologists, speech language pathologists, and special education teachers on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients.

The Office of Student and Family Support and Engagement offered one professional development sessions to school psychologists on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients. Out of 115 school psychologists in MCPS, 99 attended this session; the participation rate was 86% (Figure 2).

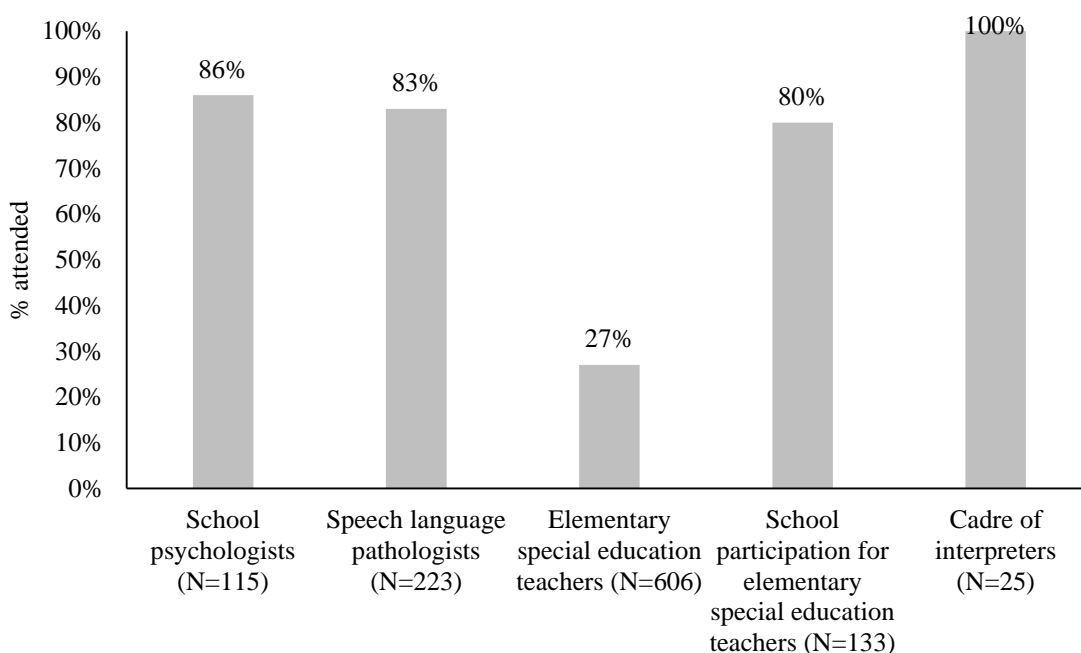


Figure 2. Attendance at trainings related to the redesigned BAT process.

Note. There are more than 25 interpreters in MCPS.

OSE offered professional development sessions to speech language pathologists on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients. OSE provided two sessions: one for pathologists in elementary schools and one for this staff group in secondary schools on. One session was for speech language pathologists. Out of 223 K-12 school-based speech language pathologists, 185 attended one of the sessions for a participation rate of 83% (Figure 2 above).

OSE also offered professional development sessions to special education teachers in elementary schools on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients. There were sessions at three different times; teachers only needed to attend one session. Out of 606 special education teachers in elementary schools, 163 attended a session for a teacher participation rate of

27%. These teachers represented 106 of the 133 MCPS elementary schools, for a school participation rate of 80% (Figure 2 above). There also were 16 other staff members who attended these sessions, including 9 from elementary schools.

During school year 2017–2018, the OSE plans to develop professional development sessions for special education teachers in secondary schools on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients.

Training Interpreters

OSE provided one professional development session for a cadre of interpreters to support school staff in assessing students, as appropriate, in selected languages. The cadre included 25 interpreters each of whom attended the session for a participation rate of 100% among this cadre of interpreters (Figure 2 above). (Note that there are more than 25 interpreters in MCPS.)

2a: Do School Teams Know Which ESOL Recipients They Should Refer to the BAT Team?

As described above, a key component of the new process is that each student’s ESOL level affects which assessments the student receives, who administers each one, and also which ESOL recipients school teams should refer to the BAT team. To analyze whether schools teams knew which students required referrals, two data sources were available. The first was the BAT referral database which included records of all students referred to BAT (n= 841). The second source was the OSE database of students who were newly identified for special education services in 2017–2018; from it, the evaluators identified ESOL recipients who were not included in the BAT referral database (n=112). The two data sources resulted in a total of 953 students¹.

During 2016–2017, school staff correctly referred 84% of students to the BAT Team (Table 3). School teams made referral errors for 15% of students, either because they made an incorrect referral (9%) or because they failed to refer students when required to do so (6%).

Table 3
Referrals by School Teams to BAT Team 2016–2017

	All students (N = 953)		ESOL recipients by level					
			1 or 2 (N = 365)		3 or 4 (N = 539)		5 (N = 45)	
Did school team make correct referral?	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	798	83.7	274	75.1	480	89.1	44	97.8
No, made incorrect referral	83 ^a	8.9	58	15.9	20	3.7	1	2.2
No, did not refer student when required	59	6.2	20	5.4	39	7.2	0	0
Not clear	13	1.4	13	3.6	0	0	0	0

^aIncludes four students who were not ESOL recipients.

Incorrect referrals included students at all ESOL levels (Table 3 above). For ESOL level 1 or 2 recipients there were 58 incorrect referrals. More detailed analysis indicated that this group included 53 students who speak languages other than Spanish; school teams should not refer them

¹ As noted above, this total excludes ESOL recipients who were assessed, not referred to BAT, and not identified.

to BAT for speech-language assessments. Further, although language dominance assessments are not necessary for students with an ESOL level of 1 or 2, there were five such incorrect referrals.

For ESOL recipients at level 3 or 4, the initial referral is only for language dominance assessment. However, there were 20 incorrect referrals that initially requested assessments other than language dominance. For ESOL recipients at level 5, school staff should not make referrals to BAT, when they suspect that such a student has a learning disability. The BAT team incorrectly received only one referral of a level 5 student. Likewise, school staff should not refer a student who does not receive ESOL services to the BAT team; however, BAT received four such incorrect referrals.

In other cases when school teams did not make a correct referral, it was because they failed to refer ESOL recipients to the BAT team, including 20 students at ESOL level 1 or 2 and 39 at ESOL level 3 or 4 (Table 3 above). To confirm that schools did not contact BAT for these 59 students, one evaluator reviewed the educational evaluation reports for a random sample of 10 students from the group. None of the 10 reports included evidence that school staff contacted BAT.

Lastly, for 13 ESOL recipients (all at level 1 or 2), there was not enough information available to determine whether the school team made a correct referral.

Based on the finding that school staff correctly referred 84% of 953 students, they appeared to be knowledgeable about the referral process. Correct referrals included 75% of students at ESOL level 1 or 2, 89% of students at ESOL level 3 or 4, and 98% of students at ESOL level 5 (Figure 3). Given that school teams were more likely to correctly refer students at ESOL level 3 or above, it appeared that school teams were more knowledgeable about referrals for this group than for ESOL recipients at level 1 or 2.

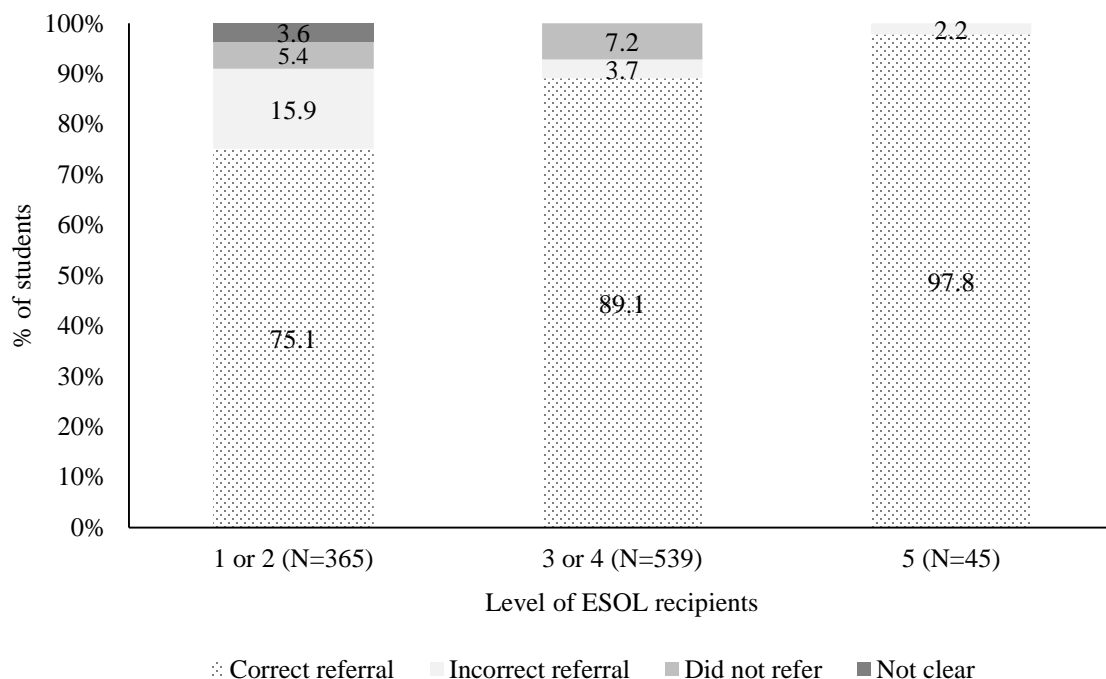


Figure 3. Referrals by school teams to BAT Team 2016–2017 by level of ESOL recipients

2b and 2c: Do School Teams and the BAT Team Know for Which ESOL Recipients They are Responsible for Completing Assessments?

As described above, the responsibility for completing assessments depends on the student's ESOL level and first language (see Table 1 above). This section combines findings for both school teams and the BAT team by presenting results of the study sample of 953 students². The main data source was the BAT team's referral database that included information on which team performed each assessment for 841 students. In cases where the correct team completed the assessment, the evaluators assumed that the team knew who was responsible. In some cases, the BAT team was supposed to complete an assessment but asked the school team to do so in order to meet a deadline; in those cases, the evaluators assumed that the BAT team did know who was responsible for completing the assessment. The BAT database did not include 112 ESOL recipients who were newly identified for special education services in 2017–2018 and should have been referred to the BAT team; because the school team failed to refer these students when required to do so, the evaluators assumed in these cases that school staff did not know who was responsible for completing assessments.

For eight out of ten students (81%), teams made correct decisions on who was responsible for completing assessments (Table 4). For about one out of seven students (15%), school teams made an error on who was responsible for completing assessments, because they made referral errors. For just over 2% of students, the BAT team made errors on which team was responsible for completing an assessment.

Table 4
Assessments of ESOL Recipients

	All students (N = 953 ^a)		ESOL recipients by level					
			1 or 2 (N = 365)		3 or 4 (N = 539)		5 (N = 45)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Did teams make correct decisions on who was responsible for completing assessments?								
Yes	775	81.3	258	70.8	473	87.8	44	97.8
No, school team made a referral error	142 ^a	14.9	78	21.8	59	10.9	1	2.2
No, BAT team made error on who was responsible	21	2.2	16	4.4	5	0.9	0	0
Not clear	15	1.6	13	3.0	2	0.4	0	0

^aIncludes four students who were not ESOL recipients.

Among ESOL level 1 or 2 recipients, school teams made referral errors for 78 of these students (more than one fifth), indicating that they did not know who was responsible for completing the assessments. Although the BAT team should complete the speech language assessment for ESOL level 1 or 2 recipients who are Spanish speakers, the school team did these tests for 11 students. Likewise, for five ESOL level 1 or 2 recipients, the BAT team should complete these tests, but school teams conducted educational or psychological assessments or both. Lastly, for 11 ESOL recipients at level 1 or 2, there was not enough information to determine whether teams knew who was responsible to conduct assessments.

² As noted above, this total excludes ESOL recipients who were assessed, not referred to BAT, and not identified.

For ESOL level 3 or 4 recipients, the BAT Team is responsible for completing language dominance tests for each student. Which team is responsible for other assessments (i.e., educational, psychological, speech language) depends on the results of these language dominance tests. School teams made referral errors for about one tenth (11%) of ESOL recipients at level 3 or 4, indicating that they did not know who was responsible for this group of 59 students. For ESOL recipients at level 3 or 4 who are English dominant, the school team should do the psychological assessments, but the BAT team did them for two students. For ESOL recipients at level 3 or 4 with mixed dominance and Spanish as a first language, the BAT team should do psychological and speech/language assessments but the schools completed at least one of these assessments for three students. There was not information for two level 3 or 4 recipients to determine whether teams knew who had responsibility to complete the assessments.

The school team is responsible for all assessments for ESOL level 5 recipients. There was an error for only one of these students; a school team referred one student at level 5 to the BAT team.

To summarize, for the majority (81%) of ESOL recipients, teams made correct decisions on who was responsible for completing assessments, suggesting that they were knowledgeable about these responsibilities. Teams made correct decisions for 71% of students at ESOL level 1 or 2, 88% of students at ESOL level 3 or 4, and 98% of students at ESOL level 5 (Figure 4). Thus, it appeared that teams were more knowledgeable about responsibilities for ESOL recipients at level 3 and above than those at level 1 or 2.

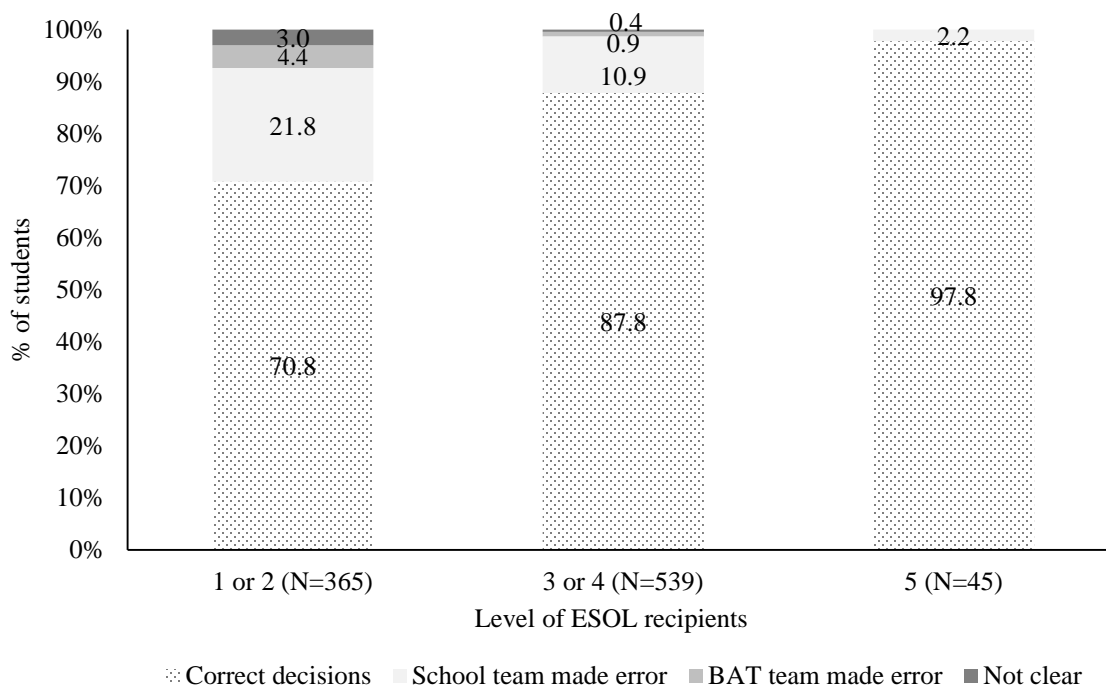


Figure 4. Assessments of ESOL recipients

2d: Do School Teams Know for Which ESOL Recipients They Should Use Interpreters During Assessments?

Whenever the school team is responsible to complete an assessment for ESOL recipients they should use an MCPS interpreter from the Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs. Table 5 lists those assessments that the school team has responsibility to complete.

Table 5
Assessments That School Team Has Responsibility to Complete by ESOL Recipient Subgroups

ESOL level	Subgroup	Is school team responsible to complete this assessment?		
		Educational	Psychological	Speech-language
1 or 2	Speakers of languages other than Spanish	No	No	Yes with interpreter
3 or 4	First language dominance in languages other than Spanish	No	No	Yes with interpreter
3 or 4	Mixed language dominance in Spanish	Yes with interpreter	No	No
3 or 4	Mixed language dominance in languages other than Spanish	Yes with interpreter	No	Yes with interpreter
3 or 4	English dominance	Yes with interpreter	Yes with interpreter	Yes with interpreter
5	All	Yes with interpreter	Yes with interpreter	Yes with interpreter

The data source to determine whether school teams knew when they should use interpreters was a database of requests from school teams to the MCPS Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs for interpretation services. There were requests for only about one half (51%) of all the ESOL recipients that school-based teams assessed, suggesting that school teams were not knowledgeable about when they should use an MCPS interpreter (Table 6).

Table 6
School Team Use of MCPS Interpreters When Completing Assessments with ESOL Recipients

ESOL level	Subgroup	Assessment	N	School team requested an interpreter	
				n	%
1 or 2	Speakers of languages other than Spanish	Speech-language	53	34	64.2
3 or 4	First language dominance in languages other than Spanish	Speech-language	0	na	na
3 or 4	Mixed language dominance in Spanish	Educational	117	62	53.0
3 or 4	Mixed language dominance in languages other than Spanish	Educational	20	12	60.0
3 or 4	Mixed language dominance in languages other than Spanish	Speech-language	10	8	80.0
3 or 4	English dominance	All	263	120	45.6
5	All	All	44	22	50.0
Total			507	258	50.9

The incidence of requests was somewhat higher for subgroups of students who spoke languages other than Spanish, including ESOL level 1 or 2 recipients for speech-language assessments (64%) as well as ESOL level 3 or 4 recipients with mixed language dominance in languages other than Spanish for both educational assessments (60%) and speech-language assessments (80%) (Table 6 above). Requests were least frequent (46%) for students at ESOL level 3 or 4 with English dominance, which was the largest subgroup of students.

To confirm that schools did not request interpreters for 249 students, one of the evaluators reviewed the educational evaluation reports for a sample of 25 students, randomly chosen from the group of 249. In 6 of the 25 cases, there was evidence that the assessment process included some type of interpreter. However, out of the six cases, in one case the interpreter was a school staff member and in five cases, it was not clear that the interpreter was from the Division of ESOL/Bilingual Programs. Thus, it appeared that schools frequently did not know when they should request an interpreter.

2e: Do Interpreters Know How to Support School Staff in Assessing ESOL Recipients?

The findings for this question were based on interviews with 15 of the 23 interpreters who had attended the training on special education assessments offered as part of the redesigned BAT process. The respondents had from 2 to 35 years of experience as an interpreter for MCPS; the median number of years was 5. The majority of interviewees (12 of 15, 80%) did interpretations in Spanish; the remainder did interpretations in Amharic (2 of 15, 13%) or French (1 of 15, 7%).

Training

The respondents reported that the interpreter training prepared them well for supporting school staff with conducting assessments with English learners. On a scale of one to six, where one was not at all well and six was extremely well, two thirds (10 of 15, 67%) replied with five or six. The remainder rated it four (2 of 15, 13%) or three (3 of 15, 20%).

One goal of the training was to clarify the role of the interpreter during special education assessments. Interviewees reported that they were very clear about their role as an interpreter for the purposes of assessment. On a scale of one to six, where one was not at all clear and six was extremely clear, almost all interviewees (13 of 15, 87%) replied six. The remainder replied five (1 of 15, 7%) or four (1 of 15, 7%).

Another training goal was for participants to understand the BID (Briefing, Interaction, and Debriefing) process for assessors to follow when working with interpreters. Interviewees understood this process. In response to an open-ended question about whether they had been able to use the BID process, only two interpreters did not use the process at all (2 of 15, 13%). Almost all interviewees described using the BID process regularly or usually (10 of 15, 67%) or at least sometimes (3 of 15, 20%). Several of the users noted the value of the debriefing; they appreciated sharing their opinions and getting feedback.

Supporting School Staff

In response to an open-ended question, interviewees described the strategies they used successfully when partnering with an assessor. Categories of strategies are in Table 7. More than one half (60%) made a point to find out what the evaluator/assessor wanted from them, prior to the interpretation. A similar number (53%) did something to put the child at ease or to connect with the child, most frequently by introducing themselves to the child and making conversation.

Table 7
Strategies That Interpreters Used Successfully When Partnering With an Assessor

Strategy	n	% (N = 15)
Prior to interpretation, find out what evaluator/assessor wants from me	9	60
Do things to put the child at ease, to connect with the child	8	53
Follow lead of evaluator/assessor	5	33
Review materials ahead of time	4	27
Use regional variations of words	4	27
Don't repeat unless assessor says it's OK	3	20
Find out something about the child before the interpretation	3	20
Translate words during interpretation, using a dictionary or translator on my phone	3	20
Be neutral, stay neutral	2	13
Know language, know vocabulary	2	13
Other (single mention)	7	47

Note. Interpreters could report more than one strategy.

One third of the interviewed interpreters spoke about the need to follow the lead of the evaluator/assessor (Table 7 above). Fewer respondents (four or three) mentioned other strategies, such as using regional variations of words, not repeating unless the assessor said it was OK, finding out something about the child before the interpretation, reviewing materials before the interpretation, or translating words during the interpretation with a dictionary or phone. Two or fewer interviewees described other strategies, including being neutral and knowing the language/the vocabulary.

Interviewees also reported their challenges when interpreting for an assessment (Table 8). The most frequent response involved children; 40% of respondents said that sometimes the child's behavior made the session more difficult or the child would not talk.

Table 8
Challenges When Interpreting for an Assessment

Challenge	n	% (N = 15)
Sometimes child's behavior makes it more difficult; child won't talk	6	40
Long sentences or passages, especially in upper grades	5	33
Only interpret those questions that the child got wrong	3	20
Not enough time, including pre and post interpretation	2	13
When I can't help a child who seems to understand	2	13
Other (single mention)	2	13
None or not much	5	33

Note. Interpreters could report more than one challenge.

Three interpreters referred to the challenge of only translating questions that the child got wrong, including two who were concerned that students realized that their first answer was wrong and therefore, changed it. However, the third interpreter preferred the approach of only translating questions that the student missed, arguing that it could be hard for a child to hear a sentence in English, then immediately afterwards to hear it in a second language, and still remember their answer in English.

Other challenges described by two interpreters were lack of time and not being able to help a child who seemed to understand. Five respondents did not report any challenges.

As a summary, the interviewees replied to the question: How well do you feel you know how to support school staff in assessing ESOL recipients? On a scale of one to six, where one was not at all well and six was extremely well, almost all (13 of 15, 87%) replied with five or six. The remaining two interpreters replied with four.

Requests for Supports or Changes

During the course of the interviews, interpreters asked for more support. Four respondents had one or more requests for more training; two wanted more detailed training on special education assessments. One interpreter asked for trainings every six months, with time for questions from attendees at the end of each section. Another requested more information on two topics: the BID process and behavioral issues of children and parents.

Four suggestions related to the materials used for special education assessments, including two requests to receive the materials prior to the interpretation, in particular the long reading passages. The other two requests were to have materials already translated, including one suggestion to acquire them from Spanish-speaking countries.

There were two suggestions that school staff should be more familiar with the culture of parents from other countries. One suggested way to do so was to engage parents through the school's Parent Community Coordinator, prior to conducting special education assessments. The other suggested approach was to increase communication with the interpreters, so that they can help build relationships with parents.

Recommendations

The above findings suggest the following recommendations to improve implementation of the redesigned BAT process:

- Provide more training to school-based staff about the redesigned referral process for special education determination of ESOL recipients with a focus on the following topics:
 - *Referrals and assessments of ESOL level 1 and 2 students.* Review when school staff should refer these students to the BAT team and for what assessments.
 - *When to use interpreters.* Explore reasons why school staff do not request interpreters and develop training or other resources to address these reasons. Review with school staff the requirement that their teams must provide an MCPS interpreter whenever they assess whether an ESOL recipient is eligible for special education services. Emphasize this requirement for students with the strongest skills in English, who are those at ESOL level 3 or 4 with English dominance and those at ESOL level 5.
 - *Use of interpreters.* Provide opportunities for more teachers to receive training on best practices for working with interpreters to assess ESOL recipients. Only about one quarter of special education teachers in elementary schools attended such training and no sessions were provided for special education teachers in secondary schools, due to limited resources. Explore online training modules as a cost-effective way to provide such opportunities and to reach more teachers.
- Given the positive reception of the professional learning opportunities for interpreters about special education assessments, provide such opportunities to more interpreters, beyond the initial cadre of 25. For the initial cadre of interpreters, provide additional and detailed professional learning opportunities about special education assessments.
- Explore ways to address the burden on interpreters of translating long, reading passages, perhaps by making it possible for interpreters to receive them prior to the session or by providing the passages already translated.

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