



Austin Voices Webinar on High-Stakes Testing and Accountability

Recorded March 5, 2024

Panelists: Linda Darling-Hammond, Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig, John Tanner, Dr. Brenda Calderon
Facilitators: Allen Weeks, Louis Malfaro

To view the panelist portion of the webinar, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoyLhqA6o3c>

To view the interview with Linda Darling-Hammond, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqeRrxzuiqVw>

Article by Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig, T. Jameson Brewer and Jimmy Ojeda Pedraza: *Examining the Myth of Accountability, High-Stakes Testing, and the Achievement Gap*. (2018) Download at: <http://www.austinvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/How-standardized-testing-works.pdf>

Article by John Tanner: *How Standardized Testing Works (2024)*. Download at: <http://www.austinvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/How-standardized-testing-works.pdf>

(Note: There is a two-minute gap between the viewing of the Linda Darling-Hammond interview and where this transcript picks up.)

JVH: So the challenge with testing and accountability is this. It's arbitrary and political.

LM: There were some questions in the chat that I think touch a little bit on what Dr. Vasquez Heilig is saying, and what Linda Darling-Hammond said, too. Why don't we rely more on educator-generated assessments? And what why are we using the standardized tests at all? All they do is seem to drive competition, comparison and the kind of top to bottom ranking that Linda was talking about.

JVH: You want me to take that? Or John or Brenda?

LM: The questioner kind of answered her own question a little bit. Another question was, given that the feds are still requiring school districts and states to do some sort of standardized testing, are there states that have actually found a way to make standardized testing a positive or useful thing rather than a punitive?

JVH: So the thing is, Linda made this case, it's not that . . . and also, Dr. Tanner made this case too. It's not that test that tests in themselves are problematic. It's how they're used, whether they're high stakes, or low stakes, whether they're formative or summative. And so that's the key pieces, that we've been misusing tests for quite some time.

So the test makers will say to policymakers, you should not use this test to evaluate teachers and decide whether they should be fired or not. They make it very clear, but policymakers go ahead and do that. And then a place like Houston gets sued, and they go to court, and the teachers win, because these tests are invalid for those particular uses.

So many folks have children, and you want to know how your kids are doing. Generally, you want to know generally what percentile they are. But these tests have 30 or 40. Questions, right? And so, you know, if a child has a bad day, and misses a couple of questions, it's a pretty dramatic impact on those scores, because these tests are, are typically just 30, 40, 50, 60 questions. There's not many questions. And so we're making these very high-stakes decisions. When I was in Houston (late '90's-early 2000's), they had decided that they weren't going to do what they called at the time social promotion, and they were holding back all of these kids, because they couldn't pass the test. Within the district, they found out how incredibly expensive that was to continue holding these kids back year after year.

So it's not that we need better tests. I'm not going to say . . . Linda, one of the things she's really known for is these different types of assessments, portfolios, etc. There's a whole set of assessments and any researcher will tell you, the more data you have, the more secure you are in the finding that you have. And so a single test on a single day doesn't tell us a whole lot. So I think that that's a key piece, that we are using tests inappropriately for what they were designed for, and policymakers are just fine with that.

AW: John, would you like to jump in?

JT: I'll even get to some specifics here. Here are all the things you cannot use any state testing program for. You cannot use it to guide instruction at a detailed level. You cannot. And yet, what did the Feds require us to do? They require us to return scores. Why? So that teachers can use them to make decisions about kids. Completely unethical use of a standardized test score. You cannot look at a relatively high score and say that must be as a result of a good school, or a relatively low score and say that must be the result of a bad school. Really? You've got to go look, you've got to do your research. It could be that the high score comes from a school filled with kids who were going to score high in any school they attend in the state, in which case you're basically awarding a participation trophy. It may be that the kids who score relatively low are going to score relatively low in any school that they go to. And yet, schools are keeping them in school, saving their lives and doing really amazing things.

The misuses are so extraordinary with this methodology and it has to do . . . in the question about why do these things, they're required by the feds, you could not satisfy the requirements under ESSA, currently, certainly under NCLB, and certainly even under the 1992 or '94 law that Clinton passed. You could not satisfy the federal requirements without using a test that has what's called an underlying scale to it. It won't work. And there are a lot of reasons for it. They're highly technical. But until we can get a policy change, these really bad accountability systems . . . excuse me, this approach to testing is going to continue with these massive misuses that we see every day.

And where that leaves us . . . I mean, imagine this test that was never designed to inform anybody about instruction goes into a classroom with a teacher who is fearful for their job. He uses it to inform instruction. All of those decisions are invalid. That doesn't make education better for that child, it makes it worse. Where does that happen more often than not, according to the equity conversation we're having? In schools where kids historically struggle. So basically, what we're doing is looking at kids in schools that are filled with children who come from very challenging environments, and say, we're going to encourage the teachers in that school to make really bad decisions for those kids. That is insane. The equity argument, and I thought that Julian hit the nail on the head . . . testing has always been a sort of testing based on scaling, which is what we've had in this country for more than a century. By the way, I used to chase it back to the 1850's based on an event, but you (Julian) got back to the Romans, which I'm impressed with. So I'm gonna have to steal that from you. I thought that was great. But it's always been used to sort and the equity argument seems to be that if we test everybody, that's equity. I've never understood that, because predictive or standardized testing has never contributed to the equity conversation in any kind of positive way that I've been able to identify.

AW I'm going to put a link to an article that John wrote recently. John is a researcher, and is deeply versed in test development as a developer himself. And it's a really good article for those of us who are lay people on how questions are developed, and how tests are developed, and what the underlying research says about that. Link to article: <http://www.austinvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/How-standardized-testing-works.pdf>

I want I want to turn to Brenda, and I know, Brenda, we've had several mentions of the Department of Ed here. And so I don't want to put you in an uncomfortable spot. But I know that we work with the Department of Ed on several projects. And I know that the Secretary of Education is pushing us, and it's like a ship where you've got tugboats that are trying to pull. It's a ship that's got a whole industry keeping it guided in one direction and habit. And, you know, we've had several decades of training and thought to go a certain direction. And I know you're trying to tug the ship, in a little different direction towards some of the things Linda was talking about with innovative assessments. You talked about the letter that the Secretary issued this fall. Could you say a little bit more about that?

BC: All right. So I do want to just sort of underline here that the federal accountability system is designed to draw resources to students who are perhaps languishing or support students who may not be meeting targets. And I think that's one important measure. Again, testing is a measure included in the accountability system. It's not the be all and end all. Very important to monitor progress, see how students are doing. To not be able to ignore the performance of English learners, for example, on a year to year basis. That is crucial. And we should be drawing resources to students, particularly where they need it the most.

But as I mentioned earlier, perhaps our assessment systems aren't meeting the mark, or there's better ways that we can start measuring higher order thinking or, or consider multiple measures like performance-based assessment or portfolio based assessments that can show us sort of a range of what students know and in their own way, to demonstrate to us, whether they're meeting the state, college and career ready standards. I mentioned the "Dear

Colleague" letter in November where the Secretary of Education is challenging states to improve their assessments, to rethink how and when these assessments are happening, and how learning is being measured. And this morning, we did announce a new competition, competitive grants for state assessments. And we do have a priority in that competition this year on the innovative assessment demonstration authority, and I know that there was a question in there a little bit earlier about whether we would be doing that in the competition this year. And we are, and that is a response to feedback that we received from stakeholders. In spring of last year, we issued a request for information around the IEDA specifically. The innovative assessment demonstration authority is a flexibility in the law that's been on the books almost a decade now that states really haven't taken us up on. Only five states have received that flexibility, and only three states remain. It provides flexibility around double testing for states that do want to innovate their assessment system.

And we're seeing how that is playing out in particular states. So for example, Louisiana is using two-year curriculum-embedded assessments. I found that there was a question here, whether that would be permissible. Louisiana is actually piloting that right now in their particular state. Massachusetts, it's using technology and hence science performance tests, for sort of bringing modernization to our effects and and we're seeing more interest in states wanting to employ more interim-based assessments so that information is getting to parents and stakeholders faster. So it is happening. And we at the U.S. Department of Education are supportive of that.

We are not only putting pen to paper here, encouraging states to do that. But we are also putting funding behind that. We are putting the competition out there for any state that wants to apply for the IEDA. That is currently just a flexibility in the law, there is no funding associated from us. And we know that for states to change their assessment system, it is very expensive to do, there's a lot of groundwork that has to happen in order for a change of that measure. And so we're putting funding behind it this year. We are going to be issuing new grants for states that want to apply for the IAEA. And we hope that they take us up on that offer. And while we don't endorse any particular type of assessment, or any curriculum, we really want to put it back on states to show us what that innovation looks like, and how you are better measuring what students know and can do.

AW Thank you, Brenda. I encourage all of you to track the things that Brenda has brought up that the Department of Ed is doing, and to go to their website and search for those things and continue to follow those. I know we've got people from different states other than Texas as well, to be able to encourage the use of those resources. So I just want to make a couple of comments just as I've listened to the conversation so far.

I've got two children, one's a high school senior, one just graduated. Both of them are really solid students. Everybody wants to say that their child was above average, you know. It's the Lake Wobegon effect. My son loves to read. He takes AP English and does well. He's going to do just fine. He's an artist. He has a lot of different interests. He loves school. He does terribly on state tests because he goes slow. He is methodical. And he's the kid who thinks too deeply about the question. So he's the one who will find two choices that are equally valid to a multiple choice question, and labor over which one. He'll see beyond the test takers intent, or their more obvious intent, or he'll see the flaw in the question itself. And so he'll get halfway through his

test. But he fortunately goes to a school where the high stakes don't matter. The school is going to be fine. So his school doesn't, you know, they're not under the gun for every kid to make a good score. So they can afford to have some low scores.

My daughter was the one who flew through the tests, and would make an equally low score on standardized tests, because she just she just wanted to get done with it and get on to real stuff. So, you know, tests are made for the convenience of the test makers, the test administrators of the system itself, and to use them in a high stakes way is a really dangerous thing that we've embarked on. And Julian, you just mentioned very simply the word politics and the other purposes behind it. And we've used something in a way that is very, very dangerous. And not the best way to do things, but in a way that's very dangerous for kids in schools. And it's why we're having this conversation today. I know in Texas, we have tried for years to tweak around the edges of the testing system, to maybe get a little less bad, and we've had some incredible folks, Like Raise Your Hand, Texas that did great work this past year, interviewing more than 100,000 people about testing around the state and held conversations. It's great work. I would encourage you to go to Raise Your Hand Texas' website, and take a look at what they've what they found last legislative session.

But still, we're trying to work around the edges of the system. The conversation today is really kind of digging into the heart of the system, maybe the validity of the of the system itself, as a way to improve education for kids. And as Brenda said, we've got to know how we're doing. But is this the best or only way? Is this, you know, really the only way? How we know on a 40 question, test? So you know, this is the beginning of a conversation. We're having it in early March of this year. In Texas, our legislative session starts next January. And this is really the time to join Raise Your Hand Texas and other partners in asking this question, going into the session. Why are we continuing to do this when we were not seeing the results? Getting the equity results that we need?

What questions do we have in the chat?

LM: When Allen and I interviewed Linda, he and I were both working our way through her book, the *Civil Rights Road to Deeper Learning*. And, you know, Allen mentioned at the beginning of this webinar, that the, when standardized testing, as we know it, when accountability was introduced, there was lots of talk about the soft bigotry of low expectations, about low-income kids sort of being in the shadows and on the corners. Testing was going to was going to direct and shine sunshine into the failed corners of public education. And you know, that there are still crusaders who will tell you that standardized testing is part of a civil rights agenda. And, you know, Linda wrote this book, and she listed five areas that she said, were really the leading edge of civil rights and public education, those areas, were having a safe and healthy community, having well-resourced schools, having supportive inclusive schools that include community schools, and then high quality teachers and high quality curriculum. So somebody in the chat was asking, Where's curriculum? And what impact does high stakes testing have on the kind of curriculum that kids and especially very needy kids end up getting exposed to?

JT: Let me see if I can let me chime in on a couple of those, because I think it's important. So one of the things that is fascinating to me about the way we treat testing is that that one of the

legitimate uses of scaling methodologies is to be able to detect the amount of a trait that people happen to possess in society. And it's kind of remarkable that we can do that, because you can't actually measure how much literacy a person has. It's impossible. What you can do is you can analyze what the sum of literacy looks like across population, and analyze the patterns in that that's a really powerful thing to do. And we see in the patterns when we analyze literacy, that there is a direct correlation to socio economics. Well, that ought to be a signal that we go fix socio-economics, you know. That's a good signal that we have a problem in society. We should go to it. And instead, this over reliance on standardized testing says, "Well, the problem must be in schools." And I mean, the complete breakdown in logic is extraordinary. But let me go back to something that was said earlier, because I think this is important. I think this is a great conversation to have. But we're all focused on testing right now. And what I want to point out, too, is . . . and I agree we need better tests, that the the testing environment in America is weirdly behind the rest of the world in terms of innovation and doing interesting things and there are a lot of reasons for that, but we have a much bigger problem with accountability in this country and that is that we remain the only profession, the only institution that we can identify, that still uses compliance or thinks that compliance can substitute for effectiveness.

And that is the most illogical thing that we do. We say, we draw a line in the sand and we say everybody above it is in compliance, you're fine. Everybody below it, you're not. We might as well say you complied with FERPA last year. Congratulations. You were a great school. And there's just no logic in compliance ever being able to substitute for accountability. In fact, the business people we work with people all over the world, they've told us that our organizations would completely fail if we were forced into a compliance-based accountability. And so we need to fix the testing piece. We have an impoverished testing environment in this country. But it wouldn't matter if we have the most perfect test in the world, the most beautiful test that did absolutely everything we wanted test to do. If we stick it into a compliance formula, we just lost, we just corrupted the very intent. Campbell's law, a very famous law, say that when we try to use this kind of a tool to make social decisions, we corrupt both the thing we're observing and the observing tool. And that will happen every single time. So I, I argue, as loudly as I can, yes, let's fix the testing piece. But until we can, in our minds, we can move outside of that compliance-based approach to accountability. These conversations are useful, but academic. We aren't going to solve the bigger problem. Until we figure out how to get past the fact that we remain completely anomalous in having picked compliance as our accountability model. And we didn't pick it, let's be clear, not one person on this call picked that model. That model was picked before us. It was picked before any of us got into education. So it's not something new, but it is something that we absolutely have to deal with.

JVH: But it does kneecap one of those arguments. Not from Dr. Tanner, but about the soft bigotry of low expectations. I posted a link in the chat. One of the things I've been very fortunate to do in the last decade was, one serve as education chair for the California NAACP, when I was at Cal State on faculty, and then when I went to Kentucky, I was asked to serve in the same role for the Kentucky NAACP. And so I've really had a front row seat to the evolution of this conversation in the civil rights movement.

I think one thing to know is that, when after Nation at Risk when these tests started to come into full view and states, Florida brought for the FCAT. And the NAACP sued the state of Florida

in *Deborah P. v. Turlington*. And so the NAACP was at the forefront of criticizing these exams for a variety of reasons. And I, I invite you to check out that case, I won't go into all the things that were argued in that particular case. Well, then you saw the billionaire foundations, in the 2000s, early 2010s. Really funneling a lot of money into various civil rights organizations. And then you saw this coalition of folks come together and say, "Oh, well tell us our are about civil rights." Sometimes you hear that same argument for choice. But in the years following that initial coalition, the NAACP came out with a very strong statement from the Washington bureau about the role that these tests had played in problematic education for African American students. And I posted that link in the blog here with that Washington bureau release. And so I think it's very clear that the civil rights movement does not agree with maybe what some right-wing politicians say about the soft bigotry of low expectations. I'm just going to be as frank as I can with you about that. I think the civil rights movement, especially the NAACP has come to a place where they understand the role that tests have taken in stratifying African American communities and the deleterious effects that they've had on black students.

AW: You know, I've got a question for our experts here. And I was a teacher for many years. And I hear lots of times that we need to have all, all third graders reading on a third grade level. And if we don't, all sorts of bad things happen. I know the test itself that's used in Texas is the STAAR test. It goes by many names around the country. But the goalposts change all the time. And Julian, something that I actually learned from you in probably 2008 or 9, when we first met, was that the test was not standard from year to year. That it was apples to oranges, even from 2008, to 9 to 10. So when we say a child is reading or not reading on a third grade level, based on a STARR test, rather than the kinds of assessments that used to be in school, what's going on?

JVH: That's a great question. Let me say something on this. And I bet Dr. Tanner probably wants to say something to this. But let me let me tell this as a story. So I was working in the Houston school district right in the middle of the 2000 election season. And I was responsible in Houston for putting together the testing reports each year, and basically figuring out what our gaps or gains had been, and then sending that up with memos to Supt. Paige and the assistant superintendent. That was one of my responsibilities in the research and accountability department. And I remember in the year 2000 that we experienced and, don't quote me exactly on the gains, but in my mind, there were like three to four point gains in every group in every grade. And I thought to myself, this is really unusual that you see these huge gains in a particular year, because there wasn't anything really that the district had done. We didn't have any large scale initiative or huge investments to see these huge gains take place in the district. Someone in my office made a comment in sort of sardonic way, and said, "You do realize it's an election year, don't you?" And I thought to myself, no, no, they couldn't, no, they wouldn't do that. Well, three years later, the *Houston Chronicle* did an investigation. And they found that the TEA (Texas Education Agency) had decided that that particular year, the test was more difficult. Now you have doing quotation marks was more difficult. So they had changed the cut scores and the requirements to pass different sections. So I'm just going to make up some numbers here. Let's say you needed to pass 10 questions. There were 10 questions in math section, if you pass seven of them you are passing because of course, in a criterion based tests, it's simply whether you pass or didn't pass. In a norm referenced test, you're comparing it in a percentile way to other people. So those are different views or different sets. And so then that year, they said, "Well, you only need to pass five instead of seven." Again, I'm making these numbers up. But

that's essentially what happened. And so at the end of one of my comments, about five or six minutes ago, I said that accountability is political and arbitrary. It's because with the state test, the TEA can manipulate how those results look, because they tell the test maker where they want the cup scores, and the and what essentially the reports should look like.

Let me give you one more story. So I was responsible for the accountability and test report for the district because at the same time that there was a Texas report for the district, Houston was releasing its own accountability report. And we were giving grades to schools. And I remember, I was responsible for setting the limits on the grades. And this is what looks like the three little bears. Okay, what do I mean by that? So I set the limits out of my head, out of thin air. I decided what was going to be an A school, a B School, a high performing school, I just made it up and I sent it to the superintendent. And Rod Paige sent it back and said, "That's too many low performing schools." So out of thin air, I decided a new level for low performing schools, and that went back to the superintendent. And that had too few low performing schools. Have you ever thought about how low performing is defined? Or why it's defined that way? Or why Houston school district was taken over because they missed by one point, some arbitrarily decided level? So these things are related. And so essentially, I sent back a third try. And that porridge was just right. And so that's the thing about these tests and these accountability levels and ratings, somebody somewhere like me, is sitting in an office and out of thin air, deciding what low performing actually is or what high performing is, etc. This is all a true story.

LM: Isn't that In part the basis of the lawsuit now that school districts have brought against the TEA, that the education agency started to signal the districts that they were going to move the goal posts. They were going to change the cut scores, they were going to make the accountability piece for high school, they were going to jigger different elements of it, the result of which was going to be fewer schools meeting the criteria.

JVH: Exactly. It's arbitrary in Texas, it's arbitrary. Political and punishing. Yeah.

AW: And underfunded. We're gonna take more money as inflation happens, you know, and you're actually going to receive fewer dollars. And Brenda, I just want to say, I know, there are states we look at longingly that are trying to be progressive that are trying to be to do the right thing. And so there is hope. And we appreciate, I think the attitude of the Department of Ed is encouraging where they can in our federal system. But John, do you want to dig into what Julian has said or Brenda?

JT: Your question was a good one because we know through research, and I'll be careful, because I'm not a reading researcher. But we know that if kids don't have some basic amount of literacy by some moment in time, that that disadvantage is likely to continue with them for a long time. And so it's incredibly important that we have information as to the degree of literacy that children possess, and so on. So these are incredibly important things to do. We can study literacy, and a population using a standardized test, but it's very difficult if not impossible to understand. The level of literacy a student possesses or an individual child possesses from one of these instruments when Binet was building these things 130 years ago (with no computers, which I find just remarkable), when he was building these things, he was very clear in stating just how massive the the error in these things was. And he wasn't saying, "Hey, I created a really

awful test built filled with error to make specific decisions." He said, I'm trying to understand something that is impossible to actually measure. And so a really flawed instrument can be useful, but I'm going to have to make sure that I never make a single decision about a child until I have lots of information from lots of different sources and can express with some confidence, a statement or a conclusion about that child. And so the test makers in the 20s (Stanford was the first) said, "We're going to invent this thing called grade level equivalence." And boy, we've just obsessed over that ever since.

My child is at a 5.3. And they're in third grade. So my child's obviously gifted and a genius, and so on. And we've just kind of sucked ourselves into that thinking. And so when we take a standardized test at third grade in Texas, and we draw a line in the sand and say why that student must be literate, the question I would have is, "Okay, go read my paper, all I can talk about how is it you analyze something you can't measure?" And that's what we do. How can you say that a student possesses a sufficient amount of literacy to be called literate off of an instrument that isn't designed to measure how much literacy any child possesses. It's impossible.

It's not that we shouldn't use it. There are wonderful uses for these instruments. We can do all kinds of analyses with these that can contribute greatly to the problem. And we should take those instruments and those results from any number of diagnostics and so on, and we should put them into the hands of a thoughtful educator who is capable and trained to make decisions about literacy. And we should entrust that decision to that person.

What we should not do is draw a line in the sand on that test and say, "Above it, you're literate and below, you're not." I mean, we'll be wrong so often in that decision, that it's it becomes an invalid way to assess. So being able to be literate by a certain age is an absolutely critical thing to do. Testing can help contribute to understanding, but if we don't put the decision into the hands of a thoughtful educator or researcher, we're going to miss the boat on most kids. And that's my concern. With the question you asked, testing can help but what we've done in Texas is we draw a line in the sand and say, "That's it." And it's misclassifying so many students that it's doing, in my opinion, more harm than good.

AW: John, if I could if I could just add to that my personal experience, again, that one of my children, that is, my son, is a senior and is a beautiful writer. I read his writing. I'm an English teacher, a writing teacher, and I think he writes like a high level undergraduate. And it's just beautiful, thoughtful, writing. He reads a lot. And so he's imbibed the sounds of good writing. And it just comes out. And he enjoys it. He was always a grade level behind coming through elementary school on all his ELA kind of measures, including spellings. It just took him time. He was still working on second grade in third grade. It just took him time. But he's emerged into this wonderful reader and writer, but the system would brand him as one of those kids that is behind. But I do want to address Brenda and say one thing. In Texas, we need ways to make sure we're not overlooking English language learners. But the irony in a state where testing has been so much at the forefront of the approach is that Texas has spent many decades in court dealing with underserving English language learners, and constantly delaying and delaying and delaying, and pushing off lawsuits, one after the other. IDRA in San Antonio has dedicated their mission to continue to hold the state's feet to the fire for English language learners, in the courts and with

research, but it has been a constant theme that the state has underfunded and under-resourced. The irony is that we have a lot of numbers, but we don't always have the decisions, the actions, to back those up.

BC: I'm going to feel a little bit like a bureaucrat here. The department doesn't endorse any sorts of specific types of assessments, or curriculum, when it comes to English learners. However, there is a requirement in federal law that they'd be annually assessed, and English learners, as you know, is a protected category in terms of the overlap in education between civil rights law and federal K-12. Law. And that intersection is quite interesting when it comes to English learner and the use of assessments for English learners, because they're not just used for accountability systems, which we're discussing here today, but for English learners is particularly important, because that is used to make placement decisions in terms of where English learners are, how they are placed in terms of their their English language proficiency. And I think one of the benefits of ESSA is that it is holding high expectations for all English learners, such that your English learner proficiency standards have to be aligned with your academic content standards.

So, you know, we've talked about having different expectations for students, what a way to sort of say that English learners, their level of curriculum, and their the expectations around what they know and can do, be the same as all students, right? We shouldn't expect to have English learners in a segregated area here, you know, you're only doing ESL services, and then we're going to focus on content centers. I think there's an expectation that these are happening at the same time, and that at the U.S. Department of Education, one of secretary Cardona's "raise the bar" priorities is on multilingualism, is on embracing the fact that students are not only English learners, but also dual language learners. There's so many benefits for cognitive development for dual language learners or multilingual learners that can speak you know, two or more languages and that has significant benefits to students.

I do think that the assessment conversations around ELS are particularly distinctive because not only are these assessments used to make decisions on placement. But they're also used to make decisions on exit and when students have reached proficiency and then are no longer considered ELS, and that data for former English learners really speaks to the benefits of knowing more than one language. You can check out our EL performance data at [ED data express.gov](https://eddataexpress.gov). There, we have all the data on our title three programs. And you will see that our former English learners, those students who were previously identified as English learners went through an ELL program and then were reclassified as ELS are actually outperforming their never ELL counterparts in some very critical measures like math and science. So I think there's a ton of benefit and in terms of embracing language, and I think when it comes to embracing culturally and linguistically diverse, there's more that we could be doing for the content assessments as well.

AW: Brenda, we had a wonderful visit with Secretary Cardona about a year ago, fact a year ago this week, at a Webb Middle School, and we had a he sat for about an hour and a half of the group of parents. And this is a school that has a wonderful English Language Development Academy for newcomers, it's had it for several decades, does great work. About 70% of the

students are English language learners at the at the school. And it is also a community school. And I think when we talked about equity, and Linda was talking about this, many of these families, we can do all sorts of learning and assessment, as she mentioned, you can measure the cow, weigh the cow, but not feed the cow. And, you know, the cow is not going to do well. You know, these students, many of them come from situations, family situations where they need extra supports. They're just fitting into the community and dealing with financial issues, there's all sorts of other issues, and they need those supports. And they do really well when they've got this community of support around them. And when they got smaller classes, and the school is intentional about smaller class sizes, budget cuts at the state level, have made that more and more difficult to keep those class sizes in place. But as an equity conversation, it really is important for English language learners. I think the community school approach, and that very holistic approach especially applies to them. And I'm very thankful that the Department of Ed has greatly increased its funding for community schools. And its focus on community schools. Certainly, our conversation a year ago, blended that with multilingualism in a conversation with the secretary. And it was very exciting. We're just about out of time. And I just want to give everybody time to make a final comment. This is the beginning of a conversation, as I said, leading into our Texas legislative session. Thank goodness, we only meet every two years. We can be thinking about how do we stop nibbling around the edges and start getting to the heart of the matter. But I'd like to give Julian a final word and Tanner a final word.

JVH: I'll try to go quick here because I have a 2:30. I'm actually in D.C. to testify tomorrow on charter schools. So I recommend you check it out of the House Ed Committee. You can watch online at 10:15 tomorrow. But on this topic, I think it's important that we not get backed into a corner that student outcomes equals test scores. And in that the state departments of education and, no disrespect to the U.S. Department of Education, make those decisions for us. These should be community driven processes, strategic and focused on the long term and the short term. We invented an idea called Community Based Accountability. That became law, because there's someone in the chat that keeps asking about where we should look. California is one of those places. They have the LCAP where communities come together and define the student outcome that they care about. So under No Child Left Behind, we were stuck with AYP and graduation rates, the dropout rates, and that was decided by some bureaucrat in some office somewhere. But what the community based accountability does is allows us to prioritize the things that matter in our community, whether it be reducing suspensions, formative summative portfolios, whatever those things are, communities come together, and they make those strategic decisions together. It's in the same vein as community schools. There's a whole set of public policy that is community based and community driven. That's an alternative to the top down approaches that we saw with education reform for the last two decades. So for every approach that's top down and about private management, there's a community engaged community based educational policy approach.

AW: Thank you. John?

I'm going to echo that. And I'm going to say that I started the community based accountability movement in Texas. We call it benefits based accountability now that we've taken it national, and it's great. And it's exactly what Julian described. It's asking about the hopes and dreams of a community, and accounting for those things in a way that makes sense to that community with

the result being and Julian's comment said it through the creation of a trusting relationship between a community and its schools. Without that trusting relationship, our public school system is going to be in serious trouble going forward. And as Julian said, it works. That's the most amazing thing to me about this stuff is it works. I'll encourage all of you to rethink accountability. I'll encourage everyone to continue to support the department in terms of coming up with better ways to test. That's never a bad thing. But let's fix the accountability piece first, and get rid of this compliance-based approach. Because until we do, like I said, and I'm a broken record, we're not going to get to the places we all need public education to be. Thank you. And thanks for having me. I really appreciate it.

Absolutely. Brenda?

BC: Thank you for the conversation. Allen. I do want to reiterate here. And I feel like I sound like a broken record that the end goal here is to draw resources and not to neglect words. You know, there there have been historically, I think, persistent gaps in how subgroups of students are doing and I think the goal here is to draw more resources to the students as the Biden-Harris administration has been a strong supporter of full-service community schools. And, you know, I think we need to think of a whole systems approach, right? It's not just one silver bullet or one simple solution that's going to address some of these challenges. I mean, when it comes to assessment, we're really putting it back on states. We are funding this work, we want to see high-quality assessment that really show what students can do in innovative approaches. So we're excited to see where that goes. Again, we just announced this competition today. So we'll be following up with more on the actual the dollars. And we hope that they do take us up on this and, and, and are encouraged to rethink the way that the sort of measurement of learning is happening so that we can draw resources to students in a more efficient and faster way.

AW: We want to thank our panel today, and we will be sending out a follow-up if you registered for this webinar. If not, please put your email address in the chat. But we'll be sending out a link to the video for this so you can show others link to the materials. And we'll continue this conversation. But again, thank you to our panelists. Thank you for all the wonderful work that you do. And thank you to everybody that's participated. We'll talk again soon. Thanks.

Biographies of Panelists:

Linda Darling-Hammond, CEO-Learning Policy Institute

Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond is the President and CEO of the Learning Policy Institute, and is a Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University where she founded the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. In 2006, Darling-Hammond was named one of the nation's ten most influential people affecting educational policy. She led the Obama education policy transition team in 2008 and the Biden education transition team in 2020. In 2022, Darling-Hammond received the Yidan Prize for Education Research in recognition of her work that has shaped education policy and practice around the most equitable and effective ways to teach and learn. She recently co-authored with her daughter Kia *The Civil Rights Road to Deeper Learning: Five Essentials for Equity*.

Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig, Provost and VP for Academic Affairs-Western Michigan University

Dr. Julian Vasquez Heilig is an award-winning, nationally ranked public policy scholar, community and civil rights leader, and creative innovator with nearly two decades in leadership roles at UT-Austin, California State University and the University of Kentucky. He currently serves as the Provost and VP for Academic Affairs at Western Michigan University. He has written extensively on the roots and development of the testing system in Texas.

John Tanner-Founder and ED-BravEd

John Tanner is a nationally-known writer, keynote speaker, leadership and accountability expert and public school advocate. In 2009, he founded Braved (pronounced brave-ed) to help school districts and leaderships define success not rooted in standardized test scores. His work on benefits-based accountability is being adopted by schools district in Texas and around the country. He has seen the testing industry from all sides, including being a state director for assessment.

Dr. Brenda Calderon-U.S. Dept. of Education

Dr. Brenda Calderon is Senior Advisor in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education of the Biden- Harris administration at the U.S. Department of Education. In this role she works to advance the Secretary's agenda for supporting a well- rounded education, supporting the educator workforce and promoting multilingualism for all, among other priorities. She formerly served as the Senior Director for Policy at New Leaders. Prior to this role she was a Program Officer with the U.S. Department of Education where she oversaw millions of dollars in state grants to support schools with low income students, support services for English learners and improve teacher professional development. In 2020, she was appointed as a State Board Member for the Virginia Community College System by Governor Ralph Northam where she voted and approved Virginia's first free community college initiative. She is a proud first generation college student and holds a BA in Political Science from UCLA, a M.A. in Education from Loyola Marymount University and a PhD in Education Policy from George Mason University.