

San Bernardino City Unified School District

A Success Story

Pearson's Test of English Language Learning (TELL)

Pearson's Test of English Language Learning (TELL™) is a touchscreen-delivered language proficiency assessment for grades K–12. It includes three types of tests to help you screen, diagnose, and monitor the progress of English language learners.

With minimal set-up time, students can begin testing. During test administration, students watch video clips and interact with pictures and words on a tablet, then answer questions out loud. They listen, write, read, and speak – all with no mark-ups or grading by teachers. TELL's innovative speech recognition and writing evaluation technology automatically scores the test and results are available in minutes.

A School District Under Pressure

Ana Applegate and her English Learner Program team for the San Bernardino City Unified School District faced a massive challenge. They had nearly 14,000 English learners at all levels of English proficiency and their teachers were not sure of each student's language ability or how to assess it.

At the beginning of each school year, English Learners were required to take the state-mandated CELDT (California English Language Development Test) but teachers did not have access to the results until January or February by which time the information was outdated and of no assistance in improving students' academic experience.

In the fall of 2015, the SBCUSD English Learner Program team introduced a new paper and pencil test so that teachers could assess to their students' language abilities at the beginning of the semester. The speaking portion had to be administered by a teacher and then, along with the written test, hand-scored. This laborious process was not popular with teachers, most of whom had to evaluate one-quarter of their students each year. Teachers pushed back and the test was scrapped.

The team was under pressure from the San Bernardino City Unified School Board to implement a better solution quickly. "We needed an assessment that was simple to administer, wouldn't require too much work by teachers, and would give immediate data," said Michelle Bracken, a Program Specialist in the English Learner Programs Department for the SBCUSD and manager of the Pearson TELL roll-out. "When we found TELL we were excited. Teachers didn't have to do anything. They got kids on the device, launched the test,



The Facts:

- 26% of K-12 students in the San Bernardino City Unified School District (SBCUSD) are not native English speakers
- SBCUSD conducted a pilot, trained teachers and administrators, and rolled out a new English language assessment test for K-12 students in 70 schools in only five months.
- New integrated skills assessment test, delivered via tablet, assesses reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills using meaningful, real-world situations.

and could walk away. That was really appealing and it turned out that teachers liked that as well.”

SBCUSD also needed a test that was aligned with California’s 2012 ELD standards and tested the same domains as the CELDT. Ideally the test would also be consistent with the forthcoming English Learners Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC) that the SBCUSD piloted during the 2016 – 2017 school year and would begin using for all schools in the 2017 – 2018 school year. “TELL checks all the boxes and now we are prepared for the future,” said Bracken.

Language Skills Critical for Common Core

With the introduction of the Common Core curriculum in 2015, English Learners faced an even greater academic challenge. “Language is embedded throughout all the content of the Common Core standards, so it’s even more critical that we know if kids are acquiring English or not,” said Applegate. “A student cannot succeed with the higher levels of Common Core without language proficiency. We’re seeing the data - Common Core is more rigorous - and we’re pulling the rug out from under English Learners if we don’t deliver more effective English language instruction so that they can reach those higher levels.”

TELL Roll-Out was a “Pleasant Surprise”

According to Bracken, deployment of the TELL pilot with ten schools in the Spring of 2016 went smoothly. “Most of the concerns that popped up were technical, but they weren’t big issues; each item was easily solved with a phone call or email,” said Bracken.

To support the full roll-out to all 70 schools in the district in the fall of 2016, Bracken and team conducted a half-day training during the summer of 2016 for personnel from each school. Assessments began in August at the start of the school year. “We were pleasantly surprised as to how little pushback there was about administering the TELL assessment at the beginning of the year when teachers were also doing CELDT and other assessments,” said Applegate.

Immediate Feedback Is Critical

Applegate and Bracken knew that teachers couldn’t wait for months to get results. They needed to know their English Learners’ language capabilities at the beginning of the semester. “Using TELL, we now have a critical piece of data - in real-time - that we didn’t have before,” said Applegate. “By knowing each child’s language skills for writing, reading, speaking and listening, teachers can address areas of weakness and we can more accurately diagnose necessary interventions. That’s just huge for our English learners.”



In today’s education system, most English Learners are not getting quality, integrated, and designated English language instruction. These students don’t have the vocabulary or academic language they need to be successful. It’s not their fault; there wasn’t a good assessment for language proficiency and it is difficult for teachers to pinpoint the exact problem. This issue has been on the back burner for far too long. We set out to change that.”

~ Ana Applegate,
Director of K–12
English Learner Programs,
SBCUSD

Laura Hunt is a language support teacher at Monterey Elementary in San Bernardino where 70 percent of their students are learning English as a second language. She said, “The TELL test was very nice to give. We were able to take the kids in, give them the test, and within fifteen minutes, the teachers had their results and knew exactly where their students were.”

TELL reports are available in minutes so teachers know their English Learner’s proficiency level and can make informed instructional decisions. The List Reports are available in an interactive roster format and teachers can compare results from two assessments, see score changes and filter by proficiency, grade, groups, classes, gender, ethnicity, and number of years in English language learning. Multi-year Aggregate Reports for administrators and Parent Reports are also available in English, Spanish, and Chinese.

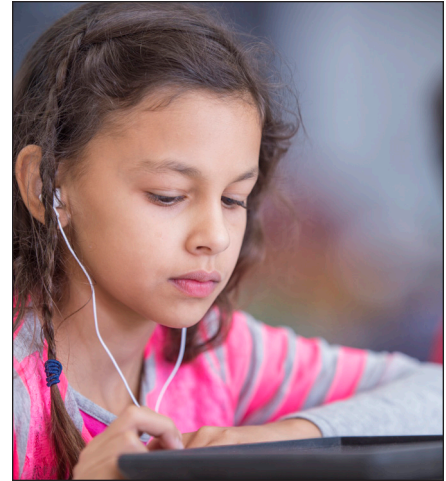
Getting results quickly enough to change the instructional approach made a big difference in the lives of SBCUSD English Learners. For example, according to Hunt, sixth grade students are eager to be reclassified by the end of the school year so that they can begin taking electives in middle school. Without the immediate feedback, that might not be possible. “We only have a limited amount of time with the kids each week. Having the scores right away meant we could focus on needed areas of improvement so that we can prepare them to be reclassified to English-proficient faster.”

TELL Popular with Teachers & Students of All Ages

“Our teachers really love TELL! We did not get any complaints about TELL during the roll-out and that means a lot to me. It shows that TELL was informative and easy to use,” said Bracken.

“Teachers really liked the immediate feedback and the reports. They told us that the information was relevant and helped them with their teaching,” said Applegate. “The students also seemed to like TELL and we didn’t have anyone say they didn’t want to take the test or brush it off, as we see sometimes with the CELDT. They have taken it seriously and told us that they enjoyed it. That is a real plus,” said Applegate.

“We were concerned that our kindergarteners wouldn’t understand the test because most of the directions are oral, so we went out and watched them take the TELL. We were amazed at how engaged they were, how productive they were with language when they had to retell something that they had watched while taking the test. It showed us what students could do when the content was meaningful, when it was interactive and engaging. Some kids thought it was like a game, they wanted to take it again. It really showed us that an assessment can be fun!” said Bracken.



Finding TELL from Pearson was big. It was wonderful! We finally had a language proficiency test that can accurately assess all elements of language acquisition.”

~ Ana Applegate,
Director of K–12
English Learner Programs,
SBCUSD

“This test was not a game for the high school students,” said Bracken. “They told us that they appreciated that the scenarios were more relevant than the previous test. For example, a scenario would ask a question like, ‘Your friend wants to get together after school but you have to study for your test. What would you say to her?’ Then TELL showed a picture of high school students and it felt relevant to our older students’ everyday lives.”

In addition to testing the four foundational skills – reading, writing, listening, and speaking - the TELL content was written for different grade and English proficiency levels.

Hunt added that the students also liked seeing their scores for the different language skills. “It was really motivating for our English Learners to get more frequent feedback and that they could see a measurable improvement in specific skills several times a year. With the CELDT they only got results once a year and it was difficult for them to see if they were improving.”

Testing All Communication Skills Improves Classroom Instruction

Teachers who are not language acquisition experts naturally struggle with deciphering whether students need academic or language assistance on a day-to-day basis. Too often they assume a reading intervention is necessary, but that may not be the case. “When you take off the ‘reading lens’ and have the TELL data about a student’s reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills as it pertains to language, teachers can more clearly see what instruction or intervention is necessary.”

TELL’s scoring technology measures several skills with a single item. This is commonly referred to as “integrated skills” assessment. When a student watches a video clip and then says what they saw, TELL can measure their speaking skills as well as several sub-skills, including grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency.



We can now do a much better job evaluating our English Learning program because we have data. TELL made that possible. I don't know how we managed without it.”

~ Ana Applegate,
Director of K-12
English Learner Programs,
SBCUSD



Teachers Request More Access to TELL

SBCUSD is planning to expand use of TELL for the next school year, adding more licenses, testing more proficiency levels, and using more features. “TELL went over quite well in our district so we’re going to be assessing even more students next year. The first year we tested beginners, intermediate, and early intermediate students - about 8,000 students in all. Next year we’re looking to assess all students at all levels from Beginners to Advanced because the teachers asked for it,” said Bracken.

The TELL test includes three types of tests: Screen, Diagnose, and Progress Monitor. During the first year of the program, SBCUSD used the first two and due to teacher requests, now intend to add progress monitoring. Applegate explained that, “Next year we’re giving an initial assessment and then there will be a mid-year comparison. Then we will also be doing the progress monitoring. We’re buying licenses for everybody because several schools have asked for that already.”

Applegate concluded, “Adding progress monitoring will enable us to do a better job with interventions for English Learners and TELL is going to play a big part of that evolution.”



The Pearson team was really responsive to our needs and questions. As the coordinator of the TELL program, I can say that it's a been a real pleasure working with them. Whenever I have a concern or a question, I get an answer right away. Pearson has been with us every step of the way.”

~ Michelle Bracken,
Program Specialist,
English Learner Programs Dept.
for the SBCUSD

For additional information or to speak with a Pearson specialist, we invite you to call 866-842-7428 or learningassessments@pearson.com | Or visit us online at www.pearsonTELL.com