

**Core  
Function**

**Process for Identify-  
ing and Monitoring**

**Effective  
Practice**

**All staff is knowledgeable about EL  
identification and assessment**

**Success Indicator PR01:** School leaders are knowledgeable about the identification and assessment processes for ELs, including how quickly the initial language assessment needs to be administered after an EL is registered with a new school, when annual proficiency tests are administered each year, what processes and training are involved in administering these tests, what support ESL teachers need to effectively administer the tests, and where the results are kept. (5894)

**Overview:** In its 1974 decision in the *Lau v. Nichols* case, the Supreme Court ruled that to comply with the Civil Rights Act, schools must provide supplemental language instruction for students with limited English proficiency. These rights were further extended to undocumented students in 1982 via the Supreme Court's decision in the *Plyer v. Doe* case. Considering these rulings, local education agencies (LEA) are currently required to screen incoming students to determine whether they require English language support services. To facilitate this process, school leaders need to know about initial and annual language assessments in several areas, including when these assessments should be administered, how they should be administered, and who should have access to the results.

**Questions:** What do school leaders need to know about initial and annual language assessments of ELs? What do school leaders need to know about the maintenance and confidentiality of language proficiency assessments? How can school leaders use this information to support ESL teachers' efforts to effectively and efficiently administer the tests?

### **What do school leaders need to know about initial and annual language assessments of ELs?**

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) - now titled "Every Student Succeeds Act" - requires that LEAs notify parents of the child's identification as an EL and placement in a language instruction educational program (LIEP) within the first 30 days after enrollment or within 14 days of enrollment if a student enrolls after the first day of school (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Thus, initial language assessments - commonly referred to as screeners - must be administered during this timeframe. Transfer students should be subject to this initial screening process as well, regardless of whether their file already indicates their status as an EL (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2017).

While it is not required, most states are members of an English language proficiency assessment consortium. Consortium members work together to develop and implement standards and assessments for K-12 ELs (WIDA, 2017). While there are a handful of states, such as California, who choose to create their initial and annual assessments independently of a consortium, forty-two of the country's states belong to one of two major consortia. Below, each consortium is discussed in greater detail.

#### ***World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA)***

WIDA provides initial assessments for its participants to use. To date, thirty-five states along with Washington D.C. are part of the WIDA consortium. LEAs operating within WIDA membership states have the option of using two initial assessments: the WIDA Screener and the WIDA Measure of Developing English Language (MODEL). The WIDA Screener is available in both online and paper formats, whereas the WIDA MODEL assessment only offers an online version. Both assessments measure students' proficiency in the four language domains: listening, speaking, reading,



and writing. It is important to note that in prior years, WIDA membership states screened students using the WIDA W-APT assessment; however, this assessment has been discontinued as of August 31, 2017.

For annual assessments, WIDA states use the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0, which has been designed in accordance with WIDA's English language development standards. ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 also assesses students in the four language domains and is aligned with the Common Core standards. Thus, the skills that are assessed on this ACCESS test are the same ones that are highlighted by the Common Core for each grade level. This assessment is self-paced; having said that, WIDA provides target administration times for each portion of the test. WIDA estimates that the speaking, listening, and reading sections of the assessment should take between 30-40 minutes to complete, while the writing section typically requires 65 minutes. Each state offers the annual assessment during a specific window of time, typically during the winter months of January and February; however, the exact dates vary on a state-by-state basis. School leadership can log on to the WIDA "Consortium Membership" webpage to learn more about their state's testing window.

### ***English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21)***

Another seven states are part of the ELPA21 consortium, which also provides an initial and annual assessments. ELPA21 members also administer their annual assessment during the spring semester; however, each member state's window varies. ELPA21's assessments are also self-paced, and the consortium recommends that the following amounts of time be allotted for testing all four domains: 60 minutes for grades K-1; 90 minutes for grades 2-5; and 120 minutes for grades 6-12. There are no maximum number of days over which a student can test.

### ***Additional Assessments***

Although these initial and annual assessments are viewed as the most critical English language proficiency data sources, research has found that administering assessments more regularly is beneficial in helping ELs attain proficiency (Boals et al., 2015). Specifically, scholars have called for the implementation of a system-wide approach that provides formative and benchmark testing in addition to the initial and annual assessments (Nelson et al., 2007; Boals et al., 2015). This framework allows various types of data to be collected, with the

understanding that data from screeners and summative assessments may not provide the right type of data needed to accurately inform instruction (Herman, 2013; Boals et al., 2015). Thus, regular formative assessments for ELs should be administered to supply teachers with data that is "instructionally relevant" (Linguanti, 2011, p. 18). Meanwhile, benchmark testing provides checkpoints during the school year that allow administrators to monitor the progress of ELs. The data from these assessments enables school leadership to make decisions about programming and staffing related to the education of ELs at more regular intervals (Boals et al., 2015).

These calls for a system-wide approach to assessment are not merely theoretical, as empirical research supports these claims to an extent. Konstantopolous et al. (2106) investigated the effect of benchmark testing on reading and math growth in the state of Indiana for pupils enrolled in grades 3-8. The authors found that these assessments had a positive and significant impact on low achievers in math, and to smaller extent in reading. Additionally, Kingston and Nash's (2011) meta-analysis found that formative assessments – particularly those that are computer-based – are proven to be moderately effective in informing instruction and ultimately increasing achievement. Unfortunately, further research is needed in this area regarding how system-wide assessment structures specifically impact EL's development of language skills.

### ***Testing Environment***

Regarding the testing environment, language placement assessments should be administered individually or in small groups. Some states have rules regarding the maximum size of a testing group, although research has found that group testing size has no effect on assessment performance if the testing environment is well-monitored (Kiger, 2005). Additionally, research has found that students perform better on assessments when they are administered in quiet rooms (Shield & Dockrell, 2008).

### ***What do school leaders need to know about maintenance and confidentiality of language proficiency assessments?***

Each consortium and individual state has explicit guidelines regarding the maintenance and confidentiality of language proficiency assessments. In terms of storing assessment results, WIDA recommends that student performance data for initial and annual assessments be



kept with the EL's permanent record file. In terms of disseminating student LEP assessment results, schools within WIDA states are provided with individual score reports for each EL. These reports must be shared with the EL's parents and teachers to keep them apprised of student progress.

### **How can school leaders use this information to support ESL teachers' efforts to effectively and efficiently administer the tests?**

WIDA (2017) and ELPA21 (2017) provide a series of recommendations regarding the ideal environment and classroom setup for the administration of initial and annual assessments.

#### **WIDA**

WIDA states that no more than five students should take an assessment in the same room at any given time. This is particularly critical for the speaking portion of the assessment, when students will be required to provide verbal responses into microphones. In terms of spacing, WIDA recommends that students sit 2-3 seats away (i.e., 4-6 feet) to ensure the confidentiality of responses. WIDA notes that students from different grade and proficiency levels can be tested together; however, they must be tested on the same domain at the time.

#### **ELPA21**

ELPA21 (2017) notes that the assessment environment should be standardized to ensure testing equity. The consortium recommends that assessments be administered in larger, classroom-sized groups to reduce test anxiety. According to ELPA21, rooms should be spacious and well-lit with little risk of outside noise and disruption. Additionally, ELPA21 mandates that information displayed around the room that could possibly help students answer assessment questions be covered or taken down.

#### **Administering Testing**

School leaders also need to make sure that faculty and staff who will be administering language placement testing complete the necessary training. Both WIDA and ELPA21 require test administrators – often referred to as proctors – to complete an online training course (WIDA, 2017; ELPA21, 2017). Each state and consortium has different guidelines, but most call for individuals to complete this training each year that they wish to administer testing (WIDA, 2017). WIDA requires that individu-

als who will have access to secure test materials attain coordinator certification. Overseeing administrators are coordinators, who oversee the entire assessment process, which includes: (1) creating a testing calendar that considers the regular schedules of test administrators; (2) ensuring that administrators have access to training materials; and (3) handling secure test materials. As it pertains to who administers the assessments, multiple studies have found that standardized tests scores are not impacted by the administrator's relationship to the test taker (Schafer et al., 2005; Rozon, 2013).

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## Resources

For many practical tools and strategies for co-teaching and cross-curricular planning for teachers of ELs, see:

Honigsfeld, A., & Dove, M. G. (2010). *Collaboration and co-teaching: Strategies for English learners*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Long Island Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (2015). *Co-teaching and collaboration for teachers of ELLs: The role of administrators*. Retrieved from [http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/co-teaching\\_for\\_administrators\\_web\\_version.pdf](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/co-teaching_for_administrators_web_version.pdf)