Core Function → Process for Identifying and Monitoring

Effective Practice → All staff is knowledgeable about EL identification and assessment

Success Indicator PR02: School leaders and faculty are knowledgeable about how to interpret standardized English proficiency score reports, what scores indicate a student should be supported by an ESL program and exited from the ESL program, and how ELs are monitored during and after participation in the ESL program. (5895)

Overview: : In accordance with the Civil Rights Act of 1965, local education agencies (LEAs) are required to provide English language support services to students who are identified as English learners (ELs). This brief examines legal protocols that LEAs must follow in regards to exiting students from ESL services. Additionally, this brief discusses the legal requirements that LEAs must adhere to in regards to monitoring students both prior to and after their receipt of English language support. In order to accurately place and exit students in ESL programs, school leaders must be capable of understanding English proficiency score reports. Thus, the brief begins with an explanation of how to interpret these assessment results.

Questions: What do school leaders and teachers need to know about how to properly interpret standardized English proficiency score reports? What protocols must schools follow in order to properly exit students from ESL programs? What do school leaders need to know about how ELs are to be monitored during and after participation in an ESL program?

What do school leaders and teachers need to know about how to interpret standardized English proficiency score reports?

Interpreting standardized English proficiency score reports differs by state. The vast majority of states are part of one of two major consortia: World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) and English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (EPLA21). WIDA is currently comprised of 35 states, including Pennsylvania, plus Washington D.C., while ELPA21 consists of seven states (WIDA, 2017a; ELPA21, 2017). Each consortium provides its own unique structure for assessing score reports; thus, a detailed examination of each is necessary.

WIDA
For the WIDA annual assessment (Access for ELLs 2.0), there are three scores that school leaders and teachers should be aware of: composite scores, proficiency level scores, and scale scores (WIDA, 2017b). The first and most important type of scores are composite scores. The 'Overall' composite score is most critical, as this score determines whether language support services are needed and at what level.

Composite scores run from 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest); students who score below 5.0 require a language support placement. The description of each proficiency level is provided below in Table 1:

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Table 1. WIDA Composite and Domain Proficiency Levels with Descriptors

Proficiency Level	Description
1 – Entering	Knows and uses minimal social language and minimal academic language with visual and graphic support
2 – Emerging	Knows and uses some social English and general academic language with visual and graphic support
3 – Developing	Knows and uses social English and some specific academic language with visual and graphic support
4 – Expanding	Knows and uses social English and some technical academic language
5 – Bridging	Knows and uses social and academic language working with grade level material
6 – Reaching	Knows and uses social and academic language at the highest level measured by this test

In addition to the 'Overall' score, composite scores are provided for 'Oral Language,' 'Literacy,' and 'Comprehension.' Composite scores are based on a weighted calculation of scale scores from two or more domains. The formulas for all four composite scores are provided in Table 2:

Table 2. WIDA Composite Score Formula

Type of Composite Scores	Contribution of Language Domain (By Percent)			
	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Oral Language	50%	50%	-	-
Literacy	-	-	50%	50%
Comprehension	30%	-	70%	-
Overall	15%	15%	35%	35%

It is worth repeating that the only score that truly matters in determining whether a student requires placement in language support services is the 'Overall' score. All other scores merely provide detail about the student's proficiency in specific domains and skill areas (WIDA, 2017). Furthermore, school staff must keep in mind that composite scores are compensatory, which means that a particularly high or low score in one area can significantly affect a composite score. Thus, it is recommended that school leaders refer to proficiency level scores in examining the EL's composite scores.

Proficiency level scores – the second type of score provided on WIDA performance reports – provide descriptions of the EL's proficiency level in each of the four individual domains. These scores use the same range as composite scores, from 1 – Entering to 6 – Reaching. Proficiency level scores are particularly useful because they allow for comparisons to be made across domains (e.g., comparing a student's reading and math proficiency levels). Therefore, teachers and administrators can identify specific areas where individual students are excelling and struggling. Proficiency levels are interpretations of scale scores.

Scale scores – the third type of score that is of value – allow for comparisons to be made among students within the same grade cluster and domain (e.g., reading). Scale scores are ideal for measuring a student's progress in a specific domain from one interval to the next (e.g., growth from initial screening to annual assessment). However, the scales for each domain are different, which means that scale scores cannot be used to make comparisons across domains. For example, a student's reading scale score should never be compared to their speaking scale score because these two scales are not compatible numerically.

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ELPA21

ELPA21's assessments are scored and reported in a much different fashion than WIDA. Like WIDA, students receive scale scores for each of the four language domains. Students are then assigned a proficiency level in each domain depending on these scale scores. However, for ELPA21, proficiency levels range from '1 – Beginning' to '5 – Advanced' (Washington Department of Education, 2016). Table 3 provides a complete look at these five levels. Descriptions for each proficiency level vary by domain and grade cluster. Thus, they have been excluded from the table.

Table 3. EPLA21 Domain Proficiency Levels

Proficiency Level
1 – Beginning
2 – Early Intermediate
3 – Intermediate
4 – Early Advanced
5 – Advanced

Students receive a score from 1 to 5 for all four domains; a proficiency level score of '4 – Early Advanced' is the target for each. In order to exit from English support services, ELs need to score a '4' in all domains. Based on these scores across domains, ELPA21 provides a Profile of Proficiency for each student (Oregon Department of Education, 2016). Students are placed into one of three groups:

Table 4. ELPA21 Overall Proficiency Levels with Rules and Descriptors

Overall Proficiency Level	Rules	Description
Emerging	A profile of 1s and 2s indicates an "Emerging" level of proficiency.	Students are Emerging when they have not yet attained a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on ELPA21 by attaining a profile of Levels 1 and 2 in all four domains. Students scoring Emerging on ELPA21 are eligible for ongoing program support.
Progressing	A profile with one or more domain scores above Level 2 that does not meet the requirements to be Proficient	Students are Progressing when, with support, they approach a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on ELPA21 by attaining a profile with one or more domain scores above Level 2 that does not meet the requirements to be Proficient. Students scoring Progressing on ELPA21 are eligible for ongoing program support.
Proficient	A profile of 4s and 5s meets assessment targets and indicates overall proficiency	Students are Proficient when they attain a level of English language skill necessary to independently produce, interpret, collaborate on, and succeed in grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on ELPA21 by attaining a profile of Level 4 or higher in all domains. Once Proficient on ELPA21, students can be considered for reclassification

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What protocols must schools follow in order to properly exit students from ESL programs?

In order to exit students from ESL programs, Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must provide documented proof that the EL in question has attained English proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). The U.S. Department of Education mandates that a student's English proficiency level must be determined by the use of a "valid and reliable ELP assessment that tests all four language domains" (p. 2). State education agencies (SEAs) are welcome to include additional criteria for exiting students. For instance, some states require items such as writing samples and letters of recommendation from ESL teachers or other faculty members (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2017). Thus, it is important for school leaders to be aware of their SEA's requirements. However, regardless of the SEA, achieving proficiency on a valid and reliable assessment is always a mandatory requirement.

Exiting students from ESL programs before they have actually attained English proficiency is considered a violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that can lead to significant legal troubles for SEAs (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). Arizona's Department of Education (ADE) serves as a prime example of an SEA that was exiting students from ESL programs in an illegal manner. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division (DOJ) investigated a complaint that accused ADE of exiting students from ESL programs prematurely (U.S. Department of Education, 2012a). In response to these violations, Arizona entered into a voluntary agreement with the OCR and DOJ that called for them to develop a new assessment tool that more accurately measured students' English proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b). In monitoring ADE's progress on the matter, the OCR and DOJ found that the state's new assessment tool still did not meet the necessary standards (Garcia, 2016). In 2016, ADE reached yet another voluntary agreement with federal authorities that once again called for higher proficiency standards to be established (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b).

What do school leaders need to know about how ELs are to be monitored during and after participation in an ESL program?

Once ELs are exited from ESL programs, schools are still required to monitor them for two years following the completion of services (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). The purpose of this monitoring is to ensure that students are not exited prematurely. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 requires LEAs to submit statistics regarding the performance of exited ELs on state standardized tests for four years after the student stops receiving language support services (U.S. Department of Education, 2016c). However, it is important to note that exited ELs are not necessarily expected to achieve proficiency on content-based state assessments, as many students who are not classified as ELs also fail to reach this goal. Instead, ESSA, which is an amendment of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), calls for ELs to be proficient enough in English to partake in content courses at grade-level (Haynes, 2017). With this in mind, the U.S. Department of Education (2016a) recommends that LEAs regularly administer surveys to educators who are teaching recently exited ELs' in order to document their progress in utilizing English in their classrooms. Kim and Herman (2010) note that while it is crucial that ELs not be exited from ESL services until they are truly proficient and ready to enter mainstream content classes, it is equally important that ELs are not left in sheltered classes once they have reached proficiency. In examining growth and achievement on state testing in an unspecified state, the authors found that, in general, ELs are quite successful in catching up academically to their non-EL peers.

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