

EL FAQ

Is it acceptable to refer to an English Learner (EL) as a multilingual learner (MLL/ML)?

PDE uses the term English Learner in line with the federal government; however, the term Multilingual Learner (MLL/ML) is increasingly used in research and professional learning activities. Either term is acceptable in formal communication.

What is the definition of a long-term EL?

The federal definition of a long-term EL is a student who has not attained proficiency within five years of enrollment in an LIEP. In PA, students are allowed up to six years to attain proficiency under the state accountability calculations.

Are LEAs required to provide EL services to non-public school students?

LEAs only provide services to non-public schools if they are participating in Title III. In those cases, the LEA must determine exactly what kind of services, if any, will be provided to ELs in the non-public setting; consultation should occur at the beginning of the year. Access [Title III](#) information for further detail.

Are LEAs required to provide services to ELs in non-public schools within their boundaries if those students live outside of the LEA boundaries?

LEAs receiving Title III funding should work with non-public schools in their geographic boundaries if those schools have elected to participate in Title III. Residence of the students is not a determining factor; if they attend a non-public school within LEA boundaries, they should be included in the non-public count for the Title III grant, and they are eligible for whatever services are provided by the LEA.

If the translation library does not offer a document in the requested language, may I request an additional language?

PDE generally cannot accommodate requests for additional languages; however, on occasion, translations may be added if the prevalence of the requested language increases across the state.

What forms/information should be updated annually in EL students' permanent records?

Annual updates are largely a local decision; however, at a minimum, LEAs must maintain:

- ELP testing and screening records,
- information collected at the time of enrollment related to the identification process,
- annual notification of participation in the LIEP, and
- program changes.

If parents/caregivers have refused services, records indicating this decision should be maintained, and any annual communication to recommend placement in the LIEP should be documented.

When should the reclassification process commence?

Schools should start to plan for reclassification in March after testing is completed.

- ELs must be selected who are likely to reach the minimum threshold of 4.5 overall composite proficiency level on ACCESS.
- Teachers should complete rubrics for each of the selected students and receive training in the use of the rubrics. (Note: Training materials are located on the ELD Portal.)
- Teachers should begin evaluating their students for language use at the end of April or early May.
- Rubrics should be completed based on a holistic review of student work and multiple evaluations of student language use over an extended period during the normal course of instruction and prior to the release of ACCESS scores at the end of May.

Can reclassification occur after a student takes a Tier A test?

If the student attains a 4.5 overall composite proficiency level, they are eligible for reclassification, regardless of the tier. Test tiers do not apply to reclassification.

What is the minimum EL population required to calculate growth and attainment in the Future Ready PA Index?

A school must have a minimum of 20 ELs to have an EL calculation in the Future Ready PA Index.

After the initial identification process, under what circumstances may an LEA screen a student?

Yes. If there is reasonable evidence that a student is struggling as a result of language needs that were missed during the initial identification process, an additional screening is warranted.

If the Home Language Survey (HLS) indicated English for all responses but the student speaks a different type of English (e.g., Liberian English), can the student be screened for EL programming?

PDE allows latitude in this situation. The LEA should first determine through its family interview process which type of English a child or family speaks. Some forms are quite distinct from American English (e.g., Kru Pidgin, Kreyol). That being the case, LEAs may screen students whose HLS indicates English for all survey responses but who speak one of the types of English that are different enough from standard American English that the student might require language supports.

Note: If the form of English a student speaks could put them at an academic disadvantage and it is tied to their national origin, it may have [Title VI](#) implications.

What replaced the Growth-to-Target reports?

PDE discontinued the Growth-to-Target reports. They will be replaced by reports that can be run locally. PDE will notify the field when these reports are made available.

Is a specific certification required to assign grades to ESL/ELD classes?

The subject of the educator's content certification area is not relevant. An educator holding an ESL Program Specialist certification can teach an ELD course in the grade band in which they have a content certification. The educator can award credit for the ELD course (usually an elective credit).

- By way of example:
 - an educator holding a secondary social studies certification and an ESL Program Specialist certification can teach an ELD course in grades 7-12 and award an elective credit.
 - an educator holding an elementary certification and an ESL Program Specialist certification can teach ELD at the elementary level. An educator can only award credit for an ELD course within the grade band of the elementary certification.

In summary, an educator at the secondary level must have both a secondary instructional certification and an ESL Program Specialist certification in order to award credit; however, an educator may provide support outside of their instructional grade band but may not be the teacher of record.

If an ELD teacher is on leave, what obligation does an LEA have to provide ELD instruction?

A substitute is acceptable if the LEA can ensure that the program is effective for the student and the substitute is working closely with an ESL specialist to design effective instruction.

If the ELD teacher is on long-term leave, administrators and the ELD team must ensure that students' language needs are being met and that the instruction is effective.

Who can provide ESL instruction in the classroom?

ELD must be delivered by an educator holding an ESL Program Specialist certification. While aides may assist in the classroom, they may not provide direct instruction.

Is there a Danielson Framework specifically for EL specialists (particularly those who do not teach in a full classroom setting)?

There is no framework designed exclusively for EL specialists.

- If an ELD specialist provides full day direct instruction, even if it is not in a full classroom setting, that teacher will use the Framework for Observation & Practice - Classroom Teacher.
- If an ELD specialist does not provide direct instruction (enrollment, scheduling, liaison, etc.), that teacher will use the Framework for Observation & Practice - NTP other.
- If an ELD specialist splits their day between direct instruction and non-teaching duties, it is a local administrative decision as to which framework will be used.

For more information, refer to [Educator Effectiveness](#).

How is an ESL specialist's time allocated in an LEA?

PDE does not prescribe teacher ratios or ways to implement LIEPs. Like the federal government, PDE uses the [Castaneda Test](#) to ensure program compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. LEAs have the flexibility to design their programs in whatever way makes the most sense for them given their local populations and needs. Each program must be resourced appropriately to ensure effectiveness. There are certainly no formulas that dictate how to calculate the number of ESL teachers required, since there are many ways to design and implement an LIEP.

Note: If an LEA does not have a sufficient number of ESL teachers to effectively implement its stated program, and the ELs are not making adequate progress in

learning English and/or achieving academic success, the LEA is obligated to make changes to its program to increase effectiveness. This may include additional ESL teachers.

Can ESL teachers be required to cover special education classes?

ESL teachers can be pulled to cover courses if that practice is used in your LEA and other teachers are subject to these requirements as needed and in accordance with your local collective bargaining agreement/contract. If pulling ESL teachers to cover other classes will have a negative impact on the implementation of the LIEP, then it must be discontinued.

How does an LEA design an effective EL Program?

An EL program can be designed in many ways depending on local needs. PDE does not prescribe program design methodology or approaches to implementation. The best approach in one school may be less than optimal in another, even with seemingly similar demographics. PDE has produced the [Consideration for Program Review Form](#) to help evaluate the comprehensiveness of the LEA's approach to program design.

How is student language growth calculated in ACCESS?

The growth is calculated using multiple years of composite ACCESS for ELLs scale scores for all students in the state with at least two consecutive ACCESS scores. The tutorial, *Calculating Individual English Learner Student Targets and Analyzing Student Growth*, offers detailed information on measuring growth and setting targets. This tutorial will be located on the [ELD portal](#) soon.

Does PDE have a recommended number of minutes/hours EL students should receive instruction by EL teachers based on their WIDA scores?

PDE does not prescribe hours or minutes of ELD direct instruction or support. Program design is a local decision. It must be designed based on sound theory and implemented appropriately to meet the needs of ELs.

- By way of example, two students scoring an overall composite of 2.0 on ACCESS may require very different kinds of support or instruction. Hard rules based on ACCESS scores are not usually the best approach for program placement and in some cases may even be problematic in terms of compliance with state and federal rules and policies.

May an LEA award credit for ELD courses taken more than once?

An EL may take an ELD course year after year, but the content of the course should move them along the language acquisition continuum. ELD content should be based on student needs; therefore, course content will vary from year to year.

If courses need to be named differently (e.g., ELD9, ELD10, ELD11) due to scheduling or recording/reporting requirements, the LEA can name them in whatever way makes sense internally, but credit must be awarded for each instance that an EL completes a course.

May an LEA provide resources for a student in the student's native language? Would this create an unfair advantage for students in which there are no available native language resources?

LEAs should not deny students any resources that are academically appropriate and beneficial for them in the name of equality. For example, if the resources are available in Spanish, then provide them to the students. LEAs should strive to provide native language resources to as many students as possible.

May EL students participate in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs?

Yes, EL students may participate in CTE programs. The CTC/AVTS is responsible for ensuring that language is not a barrier to meaningful instruction for ELs. The sending LEA is not responsible for support in this area.

For example, a comprehensive CTC/AVTS must provide the full curriculum, which will include ELD services. A non-comprehensive or occupational CTC/AVTS is only responsible for providing the specialized content courses.

What are best practices for rescreening students who may have initially passed a screening?

An LEA may re-screen at their discretion if they have compelling evidence that the results of the screener were inaccurate based on sufficient classroom observations, academic performance, and interaction with the student. It is not a good practice to re-screen within a month or two of the initial screening. However, as stated previously, if an LEA has compelling evidence that the student may need language supports, they may re-screen to either refute or verify the initial result during a single school year.

Can ELs be pulled from electives to receive ELD direct instruction?

To the greatest extent possible, LEAs should work with students to ensure that they are not being restricted from taking courses that they wish to take. When there is a conflict, the LEA should work to accommodate the student's wishes when possible.

For example, the LEA may:

- rotate the pullout time by semester so the student can take an elective for part of the year
- change the time of the pullout for part of the year
- implement a different format for ELD instruction

Note: ELD cannot be scheduled in lieu of any core content courses (e.g., math, science, social studies, ELA).

Are parents/caregivers required to complete the parent opt-out form for the ELD Program annually?

If the parent/caregiver completes the opt-out form at the time of enrollment (making the decision to refuse specialized services), LEAs should contact the parent/caregiver annually to reiterate the benefits of the program and provide the opportunity to accept the specialized services. At that time if the parent/caregiver elects to accept services, the form is completed again.

If they choose to continue to opt out, there is no need to complete the form.

If a parent/caregiver opts a student out of ELD programming, is the student exempt from ACCESS testing?

Students, whose parents/caregivers have refused specialized separate services, are required to participate in the annual ELP testing in accordance with federal law.

In addition, LEAs are still required to provide all the necessary supports to overcome language barriers in order to make the academic program accessible and meaningful for the students.

Can the host family for a foreign exchange student complete the Home Language Survey (HLS) and family interview?

The host family, with input from the student, can complete the HLS and the family interview.

If an LEA receives a letter from the Department of Homeland Security that states a student is receiving their US citizenship, do we remove the immigrant status on their enrollment page in the LEA's student management system? Do we need to do anything else?

Immigrant status is a code used for federal Immigrant Grant funding under Title III and is unrelated to immigration status. Students are considered immigrants for funding purposes during their first three years in US Schools. There is no action to take as a result of immigration status changes like the one described above.

How do EL coordinators receive information/updates from the Pennsylvania Department of Education?

PDE has created a [SAS PDE English Language Portal](#). This portal houses all state-sponsored professional learning opportunities, support materials, and technical assistance resources related to the education of English learners (e.g., FAQs, translation documents, guidebooks).

Are ELs in Pennsylvania allowed to remain in school until 21 or is this only for special education?

ELs are entitled to remain enrolled in school through the end of the year in which they turn 21. Review the [Enrollment of Students BEC](#) for more information.

Is the WIDA screener an appropriate tool to use during the school year to check an EL's proficiency level?

The screener is not designed for this purpose. Options may include the WIDA MODEL (which must be purchased from WIDA) or a locally developed assessment. WIDA proficiency level descriptors, rubrics, and ELD standards can also assist in this type of analysis.

Note: Formative information gathered during ongoing interaction with students is very valuable when considering a student's current ability and level of need.

Are LEAs required to screen foreign exchange students?

Foreign exchange students are subject to the same process utilized for other students when determining EL status.

If the student comes from an environment where another language is used that is also tied to their national origin (which will likely be the case for most foreign exchange

students), the LEA must follow the steps in the identification procedure to determine if they qualify for EL services.

Note: The identification procedure may include screening with the WIDA Screener. Scores from another assessment may not be used for this purpose.

Is there a requirement to cover/hide academic content during WIDA testing?

Since ACCESS does not assess content, it is not necessary to cover or remove anything that would provide content information (e.g., a periodic table, math formulas) except for posters or displays that could assist students with language (e.g., grammar posters, color charts, classroom labels).

What is the recommended protocol if a student declines to take the ACCESS test, is unable to take the ACCESS test, or is not present to take the ACCESS test?

The “do not score” code should be applied to the necessary sections of the test, per the Test Coordinator Manual.

What is the recommended protocol when a student with a speech disability requires an exemption on the ACCESS?

The “do not score” code of SPD should be applied, per the Test Coordinator Manual.

What is the protocol for ELs testing when there is a school closing?

While tests can be transferred from one LEA to another through DRC if the receiving school contacts DRC, it is recommended that tests be administered at the sending school.

May an LEA request an ACCESS testing extension?

LEAs should contact PDE to request an extension. An extension may be granted; however, it is dependent on the state testing timelines.

Note: LEAs should begin testing as soon as possible after the testing window opens to allow for unforeseeable delays or disruptions.

What are the WIDA testing expectations for homebound students?

Students who are homebound are required to participate in the annual ELP testing. If

the student cannot participate in the school setting, then a trained and qualified staff member should administer the test at the student's home with the appropriate security protocols.

What is the protocol if an LEA orders WIDA materials for students who subsequently relocate to another state?

LEAs should return the books at the end of the testing window.

Note: Students no longer enrolled will not be captured in the winter snapshot PDE uses for accountability.

Can a parent/caregiver opt their student out of taking the WIDA ACCESS test?

The WIDA ACCESS test is required by federal law; thus, parents/caregivers may not opt out of the annual ELP assessment.

If a rubric for a student is completed prior to release of ACCESS scores and the student scores below 4.5, how does an LEA proceed?

The LEA must decide which students are likely to reach a 4.5 on the ACCESS overall composite and have teachers complete rubrics before the scores are released at the end of May. Some students may not score a 4.5. In those cases, they are simply not eligible, and the rubrics should just be filed. Some students for whom rubrics were not completed prior to the score release may unexpectedly score above 4.5. In those cases, the rubrics may be completed after the scores are released.

See the [policy document](#) and the [reclassification training](#) for more information.

What is the deadline for ACCESS testing completion?

ACCESS testing dates are available on the [Pennsylvania WIDA website](#).

When are ACCESS testing dates available?

Typically, the dates are finalized and published in early August.

How do I access my DRC and WIDA logins?

LEA coordinators should contact the DRC help desk to create a coordinator account for access to the WIDA Assessment Management System (AMS). The coordinator then

creates accounts for teachers. Teachers should contact their LEA coordinator to gain access to the WIDA Secure Site.

LEAs should contact WIDA to create an account for access to the WIDA Secure Site.

Must all three years of ACCESS scores be consecutive for the reclassification criteria for ELs with disabilities?

Yes, the three ACCESS test scores leading to reclassification for ELs with disabilities must be consecutive. If a student misses a year, then the timeline starts over.

Can a student's one-to-one be in the room during an ACCESS test?

Yes, but they will have to complete non-disclosure if they are exposed to test materials.

If a student moves to a new school, to which school are the accountability calculations attributed?

Accountability calculations are attributed to the school in which the student is enrolled at the time of the most recent testing.

Should an LEA be concerned if older and higher proficiency level ELs are making smaller gains than younger students and those at lower proficiency levels from year to year?

No. Typically data shows that younger students tend to make larger gains than older students and students at lower proficiency levels tend to make larger gains than those at higher proficiency levels.

What is the protocol for assessing EL students for retention?

Yes, ELs can be retained in a grade if English proficiency is not the main or sole reason for the retention.

If adequate supports were not provided or there is uncertainty about whether language proficiency is the root cause for the lack of academic progress, retention should be reconsidered, and LEAs should focus on supports to make content accessible.

See the [EL BEC](#) for this requirement.

Where can I find information for EL students regarding PSSA and Keystone Exams administration?

Two handbooks are available to address accommodations for EL students:

- [2023 Accommodations Guidelines \(PDF\)](#)
- [2023 Accommodations Guidelines for ELs \(PDF\)](#)

The manuals address topics such as: word to word translation dictionaries, Spanish/English versions, and exemptions.

I am seeking PA Department of Education recommended word-to-word translation glossaries for the Biology Keystone and Science PSSA (4th and 8th). I see a list of distributors on the state's [Accommodation for ELs document](#), however, I do not see any specific resources recommended.

We do not make recommendations for any specific word-to-word translation dictionaries. Keep in mind they must follow the guidelines set in the [PSSA/Keystone Accommodations Guidelines for English Learners \(ELs\)](#), be approved by your SAC, and most importantly should be resources that students are familiar with and have used prior to the assessment. They may not be introduced for the first time on the date of the state assessments.

Can students be provided with the Spanish/English PSSA assessments if they do not have Spanish listed as a home language? The students' home language is Mayan, but they are proficient in Spanish.

That is allowable at the LEA's discretion. There's no need to update the HLS or the reported languages.

What is the cutoff for the federal exemption from the PSSA ELA test?

This exemption is allowable only once for students who have been enrolled in US school for fewer than 12 months. The time starts on the last day of the testing window for the PSSA ELA or Literacy Keystone Exam from the previous year. If a student enrolled in US schools for the first time after the last day of PSSA ELA or Keystone Literature testing the previous year, then he/she is eligible to be exempted from the test. This is covered in the [PSSA/Keystone Accommodations Guidelines for English Learners \(ELs\)](#). From the manual:

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) signed into law on December 10, 2015, allows flexibility for EL students whose enrollment in a school in one of the 50 States in the United States or the District of Columbia fewer than 12 cumulative months (not consecutive) an option of taking the ELA PSSA or Literature Keystone exam. A student's enrollment in a school in Puerto Rico is not to be considered as enrollment in a U.S. school. It is incumbent upon the LEA to determine a student's status. The eligible student will have been enrolled in a US school less than or equal to 12 cumulative months by the end of the current school year PSSA ELA/Keystone Literature testing window.

Related to PSSA, if students have the Spanish booklet for math, they are permitted to write in either English or Spanish. The LEA is not responsible for translating Spanish answers to English, is that correct?

Yes, please refer to the [PSSA/Keystone Accommodations Guidelines for English Learners \(ELs\)](#) for detailed explanations.