

English Language Proficiency Assessments - Introduction

Overview of English Language Proficiency (ELP) Assessments

Washington is home to a diverse population of learners. This includes students who meet the definition of Multilingual Learner (ML). Federal law governs the education of MLs with mandates that contain two key components: standard entry and exit expectations for English language development (ELD) services, and the administration of annual English language proficiency (ELP) assessments.

To meet these requirements, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) provides placement assessments and annual assessments, managed by OSPI's [ELP assessment program](#), and offers guidance on program services, overseen by OSPI's [Multilingual Education \(MLE\) program](#).

Legal Requirements of ELP Assessments

MLs are a protected class under civil rights law, and multiple federal laws address the identification, classification, and education of MLs. Effectively providing an equitable education to MLs requires an understanding of the legal foundation in federal and state laws that drives ML identification, classification, and education.

Additional information regarding these laws can be found in the following resources:

- [Introduction: Civil Rights & Federal and State Laws](#)
- [Federal Law and Policy Foundations](#)

Federal Requirements

While there are multiple federal dictates supporting MLs, the primary law that connects with ELP assessments is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by Section 3113 of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This law requires states education agencies (SEAs) to establish and implement standardized statewide entrance and exit procedures for MLs.

These standardized entrance and exit procedures are then used to determine if a student is classified as ML and therefore entitled to ELD services as required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA).

Under these two provisions, all SEAs and local educational agencies (LEAs) are legally obligated to ensure that MLs can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs and services. Assessment-related requirements under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the EEOA include:



- Identify and assess all potential MLs in a timely, valid, and reliable manner.
- Monitor and evaluate MLs in language assistance programs to ensure their progress with respect to acquiring English proficiency and grade-level content knowledge, exit MLs from language assistance programs when they are proficient in English, and monitor exited students to ensure they were not prematurely exited and that any academic deficits incurred in the language assistance program have been remedied.

State Requirements

The state Transitional Bilingual Instruction Program (TBIP) covers the identification, education, and assessment of ML students. State law that directly addresses ELP assessments is found in the following resources:

- [RCW 28A.150.220: Basic education—Minimum instructional requirements—Program accessibility—Rules.](#)
- [Chapter 28A.180 RCW: TRANSITIONAL BILINGUAL INSTRUCTION PROGRAM](#)
- [Chapter 392-160 WAC:](#)

ELP Assessments in Washington

Washington is a member of a multi-state consortium with the [WIDA Consortium](#), which provides the ELP placement and ELP annual assessments. Washington joined the WIDA Consortium in the 2021-2022 school year, and it is the most recent ELP assessment that Washington has utilized. Other recent ELP assessments include the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) and the Washington English Language Proficiency Assessment (WELPA). WIDA assessments are based on the [ELD Standards Framework](#), and WIDA is guided by a set of principals that include their [mission, vision, and values](#).

All traditional public schools, public charter schools, accredited non-public schools participating in the Choice Scholarship Program, and accredited non-public schools participating in Title III are required to utilize these ELP assessments to identify and monitor MLs. This ensures compliance with federal law, specifically [ESSA \(2025\) Title I, Part A, Sec. 1111\(b\)\(2\)\(G\)](#). Furthermore, the alternate annual assessment satisfies the federal accountability requirements in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004).

Placement Assessments

ELP placement assessments are used to determine the ELP of potential MLs. The WIDA Screener is designed to provide an initial measure of a student's ELP across the four language domains for reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and results formally identify students as MLs and ensure that they receive legally required ELD services.

Students whose Home Language Survey (HLS) indicates a language other than English on their initial enrollment in a Washington school must take one of the four available WIDA Screeners to determine eligibility for ELD services.

- [WIDA Screener](#): The ELP placement assessment for grades 1-12.
- [WIDA Screener for Kindergarten](#): The ELP placement assessment for kindergarten.
- [WIDA Screener Paper](#): Available for students in grades 1-12 who need paper as an accommodation during testing.
- [WIDA Alternate Screener](#): Available for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and qualify for alternate assessment.

The WIDA Screener administered is dependent on student grade level and need, and in Washington, students must be screened on grade level. Additionally, in Washington, students must be screened within ten school days of their first day of school attendance.

Annual Assessments

Annual assessments are used to measure the current ELP of MLs receiving services. WIDA ACCESS assessments measure progress across the four language domains: Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing.

These tests must be administered annually to all identified MLs in grades K-12 between January and March each year. Results are used both for accountability purposes and to determine continued eligibility for ELD services. Students who meet the established exit criteria are eligible to exit services. In Washington, students must test on grade level.

There are four different types of WIDA ACCESS assessments that offer online and paper test delivery options depending on student grade level and student need. All four types of annual assessments serve the same function of measuring the ELP of MLs and determining continued eligibility for ELD services.

- [WIDA ACCESS Online](#): WIDA ACCESS Online is the annual assessment for identified MLs in grades 1-12.
- [WIDA Kindergarten ACCESS](#): WIDA Kindergarten ACCESS is the annual assessment for identified MLs in kindergarten. This paper-based test must be administered to students individually.
- [WIDA ACCESS Paper](#): WIDA ACCESS Paper is the paper-based version of the WIDA ACCESS Online. This assessment is only available to students who need paper assessments as an accommodation on their IEP or 504.
- [WIDA Alternate ACCESS](#): WIDA Alternate ACCESS is the annual assessment for MLs in grades K-12 who have significant cognitive disabilities that prevent meaningful participation in the standard WIDA ACCESS assessments. This large print, paper-based test must be administered to students individually.