

Iowa English Learner Assessment Procedures

This document outlines procedures related to language assessment of English learners (ELs) in Iowa, for both the screening process for eligibility and placement decisions, as well as the summative assessment for measuring progress in English language development.

Overview of State and Federal Requirements

Federal law, federal guidance, and state code identify state, district, and school responsibilities for assessing students for the purpose of determining both their initial and ongoing eligibility for language development services as well as for notifying parents of ELs of their participation in an EL program. In Iowa, the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century (ELPA21) Dynamic Screener and Summative assessments serve to meet the requirements for initial screening and annual monitoring of progress toward English proficiency [Iowa Administrative Code 281.60.2; Every Student Succeeds Act Sec. 1112(e)(3)(a), Sec. 1112(e)(3)(b), Sec. 3113(b)(2)].

Identification Procedures

Districts are responsible for assessing students who have been identified as using a language other than English in the home. The test shall assess students' English proficiency in the areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. A consistent plan of evaluation which includes ongoing evaluation of student progress shall be developed and implemented by the district for each student identified [Iowa Administrative Code 281-60.2].

Home Language Survey

All parents of new students enrolling in an Iowa school district must complete a Home Language Survey (HLS). This is the first step in the process of identifying ELs. Questions are designed to find out more about the language background of students in order to determine which students need to take the English language screening assessment. For more information, consult [Entrance and Exit Procedures for Iowa's English Learners](#).

Administering the Screener

- Any student new to Iowa (kindergarteners and students moving in from out of state) whose HLS indicates a prominent use of a language other than English will be expected to take the ELPA21 Dynamic Screening Assessment or the Alt ELPA Screener within 30 days of enrollment.
- Students arriving in an Iowa school from another ELPA21 state with an ELPA21 assessment score (Screener or Summative) do not need to be screened. A district may use the results to determine eligibility. Evidence should be documented and included in the student's cumulative file.
- For any student previously enrolled in an Iowa school, the receiving district may obtain verification of a completed HLS. If the student has previously been identified as eligible for English language instructional services, an additional screening assessment is not necessary, and the student should continue to be identified as an EL according to the results of the original screening assessment. This applies even in cases where the parent/guardian has chosen to waive English-language services.
- If a completed HLS and/or eligibility for EL services in a previous Iowa school cannot be verified by the receiving district, the ELPA21 Dynamic Screening Assessment must be administered for students whose new HLS indicates a language other than English is used in the home. This includes students with significant cognitive disabilities.

See [Identification of ELs: Approved Assessment Procedures for Transfer Students](#) for more information.

Notifying Parents

Once students are identified for English development services, districts must provide parents of ELs with a notification that outlines their child's identification and placement in a program. The notification must include the child's level of English proficiency (as measured by the assessment), the methods of instruction, the exit requirements, along with other statutorily required information as well as be communicated in a language understandable to parents. ESSA requires that this notice be provided no later than 30 calendar days after the beginning of the year or within the first two weeks of placement in the program for a student who enrolls after the start of the school year [ESSA Sec.1112(e)(3)(a), Sec. 1112(e)(3)(b); Addendum to Sept. 23, 2016 Non-regulatory Guidance: English Learners and Title III of the ESEA, as Amended by ESSA, (pages 1-2)].

Testing Requirements

Annual Summative Assessment

- Each and every student identified as eligible for English Language instructional services must complete the state's annual test of English proficiency that is aligned to the state's ELP standards. In Iowa, the ELPA21 general assessment and the Alt ELPA for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities meet this requirement [ESSA Sec. 1111(b)(2)(G)(i) and (ii)]. This testing requirement includes students whose parent/guardian has chosen to waive services.
- If a student enrolling during the testing window has already been screened and identified as an EL in a previous Iowa district, the student must complete the ELPA21 or the Alt ELPA summative assessment in the receiving district, unless the summative assessment was completed in the previous district.
- Students enrolling in the district from out of state or out of country who qualify for services within the first 4 weeks of the 8-week summative testing window are expected to complete the ELPA21 or the Alt ELPA summative assessment. The results will be used as baseline Year 1 data to determine progress toward English proficiency in succeeding years. Students arriving in the last 4 weeks of the 8-week window will be expected to complete screening procedures, and if identified, the district will determine if there is a reasonable amount of time left in the window to administer the summative test.

Assessment Accessibility Considerations

Any variance from standard administration procedures, including accommodations and/or domain exemptions, is determined by the student's IEP team, which must include participation of (preferred) or input from the English Language development teacher. All accommodations and/or domain exemptions must be documented in the student's IEP or 504 Plan.

Accommodations

Accommodations are granted for students for whom there is documentation of need on an IEP or 504 Plan so that students can show what they know and can do on the ELPA21 assessments. Information from the [ELPA21 Accessibility and Accommodations Manual](#) and the [Alt ELPA Accessibility and Accommodations Manual](#) must be used by IEP teams when selecting appropriate accommodations that do not invalidate the test construct.

Alt ELPA

The Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessment, or Alt ELPA, is the English language proficiency assessment developed for English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Students participating in the Alt ELPA will meet the state's annual English language testing requirement, which means

they do not take the general ELPA21 summative assessment. The Alt ELPA is aligned to the [ELP Standards for English Learners with Significant Cognitive Disabilities](#). This set of standards guides classroom instruction and forms the basis of the test's design. For more information, see [Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessment Guidelines](#).

Domain Exemptions

An exemption from testing in one or more domains of the ELPA21 assessments may be granted based on individual student needs according to the guidelines below. It is important to note that an exemption may be appropriate for students who do not have access to a domain due to the nature of their disability. It is not an option for students who may be expected to perform poorly. It is important to have a means of measuring receptive modes (reading/listening) and productive modes (writing/speaking); therefore, only in rare circumstances will exemptions from three domains be approved. If approved, the domain exemption will be marked in the test administration platform by the state ELPA21 consultant. The request should be made prior to beginning the test. It is important to note that there are no exemptions from the test itself. For more information, contact the state ELPA21 consultant.

Reading Domain: The reading domain assesses understanding of written English. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, who may have been approved for a reading domain exemption in past years, now have a more accessible assessment available, the Alt ELPA, and as a result, will no longer need a reading exemption in most cases. For the Alt ELPA, the reading domain test may be read aloud if it is an accommodation stated in the IEP. In the rare case that an IEP team recommends a reading domain exemption for the Alt ELPA, the district test coordinator will need to make a request using the Unique Accommodations Request Application process as outlined in the [Statewide Assessment System Accessibility Manual](#), Tool 22. To receive an exemption from the reading domain subtest of the Alt ELPA, the following criteria must be met:

1. The learner's IEP states that the student takes alternate assessments (Alt ELPA, DLM, and/or EL-AA), and
2. The IEP team has determined that the reading domain on the Alt ELPA is not accessible to the student even with accommodations, and
3. An exemption for the reading domain is documented in the IEP or 504 Plan, and
4. The request for the exemption has been approved by the Iowa Department of Education.

Listening Domain: The listening domain test assesses comprehension of spoken English. English learners who are deaf or hard of hearing and are unable to hear the listening domain subtest even with the aid of a device may be eligible for an exemption. In the case that an IEP team determines that the listening domain is not accessible, an application must be made and approved using the Unique Accommodations Request Application as outlined in the [Statewide Assessment System Accessibility Manual](#), Tool 22. A student may be approved for an exemption from the listening domain if the following criteria are met:

1. The learner has been identified with a potentially educationally significant (PES) or educationally significant (ES) hearing loss as documented by an educational audiologist, and
2. The learner cannot hear and respond to the audio content of the ELPA21 listening practice test. Sign language is not an allowable accommodation on the ELPA21, except for signing the overall test directions. (Students taking the Alt ELPA, however, are allowed the use of sign language, communication devices, and other communication supports which greatly reduce the need for a listening domain exemption), and
3. An exemption for the listening domain is documented in the IEP or the 504 Plan, and
4. The request for the exemption has been approved by the Iowa Department of Education.

Speaking Domain: The speaking domain test assesses production of spoken English, including correct use of English grammar. ELs who are deaf, hard of hearing, nonverbal, or utilize a communication device with limited response options may be approved to receive an exemption from the ELPA21 speaking domain subtest. In the case that an IEP team determines that the speaking domain on the Alt ELPA is not accessible, an application must be made and approved using the Unique Accommodations Request Application as outlined in the [Statewide Assessment System Accessibility Manual](#), Tool 22. A student may be approved for an exemption from the speaking domain if the following criteria are met:

1. The learner is identified with a PES or ES hearing loss as documented by an educational audiologist, and/or
2. The learner does not express spoken English. Note: Sign language is not an approved accommodation on the ELPA21 because scoring for the speaking domain includes correct usage and grammar. Students taking the Alt ELPA, however, are allowed to respond with sign language and other communication supports, and
3. An exemption for the speaking domain is documented in the IEP or 504 Plan, and
4. The request for the exemption has been approved by the Iowa Department of Education.

Writing Domain: The writing domain assesses the production of written English. Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who may have been approved for a writing domain exemption in past years now have a more accessible assessment available, which means they may no longer need a writing exemption. Students taking the ELPA21 or Alt ELPA do not need to physically write with an instrument in order to participate in the writing domain assessment. They may respond using their communication system, or they may use a scribe. In the case that an IEP team recommends a writing domain exemption, the district test coordinator will need to make a request using the Unique Accommodations Request Application as outlined in the [Statewide Assessment System Accessibility Manual, Tool 22](#). To receive an exemption from the writing domain subtest of the Alt ELPA, the following criteria must be met:

1. The learner's IEP states the student takes alternate assessments (Alt ELPA21, DLM, and/or EL-AA), and
2. The IEP team has determined that the writing domain on the Alt ELPA is not accessible to the student even with accommodations, and
3. An exemption for the writing domain is documented in the IEP or 504 Plan, and
4. The request for the exemption has been approved by the Iowa Department of Education.

Screener Domain Exemption Requests: In the case of a student arriving from out-of-state or country with a disability and an IEP is not yet in place, contact the ELPA21 State Consultant for guidance on possible exemptions for the Dynamic Screener based on other evidence.

Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Students with significant cognitive disabilities must be provided the opportunity to respond to a minimum of three test items on each tested domain of the Alt ELPA summative assessment. As long as the student is responding, regardless of whether or not the answers are correct, test administration must continue. If the student is not able to provide any response for three consecutive items, the Alt ELPA test administrator may submit the test with all items left unanswered and advance the student to the next domain subtest. This applies only to students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Religious Exemptions for Non-technology Administration

Paper test forms and other non-technology-based administration procedures will be used for students in schools with state-approved religious exemptions.

Preferred Language Translation of Directions Designated Support

According to the ELPA21 Accessibility and Accommodations Manual, translation of general test directions (not item prompts or questions) is a language support available to students prior to starting the actual test. Test directions can be provided by utilizing audio files from ELPA21, being read aloud by an educator fluent in the home language or signed by a deaf and hard-of-hearing specialist. Translated audio files and transcripts for directions are provided in some languages and can be found under Resources on the ELPA21 Portal. If a translation is needed in a language not currently available, the district must complete the following steps:

1. Designate a person who will translate only the directions in the target language. The translator must be proficient in both English and the target language (using Google Translate or other similar service is not allowed).
2. The translator must complete the required test administrator training course if they are assigned the role of test administrator.
3. The translator must sign the Test Security Confidentiality Agreement found in the [Iowa Test Security Manual](#), and a copy must be kept on file with the assessment coordinator.

Eligibility decisions for “Proficiency Not Demonstrated” designation

It is important that all students taking the ELPA21 Dynamic Screener advance to the first operational item in Step 2. Step 1 only contains practice items. By advancing to Step 2, an Individual Score Report (ISR) is generated which includes a proficiency determination. The score is used to determine English learner allocation funding levels. If, after multiple attempts, a student refuses to participate because they are unable or unwilling to engage with the test, the resulting ISR will indicate a proficiency level of Proficiency Not Demonstrated. Students with this designation are considered eligible for English language services in the state of Iowa.

Authorization to administer assessments

Districts must ensure that educators administering the ELPA21 and Alt ELPA assessments meet the qualifications as stated in the [Iowa Test Security Manual](#). See below for required qualifications.

Summative Assessment

The ELPA21 and Alt ELPA summative assessments must be administered by licensed Iowa educators who have completed all necessary training module(s) for each form of test being administered.

Screening Assessment

In addition to using licensed educators to administer the summative assessments, districts may also choose to have the Dynamic Screener assessment administered by a non-licensed educator if the district utilizes a central “welcome center” registration process. All non-licensed staff utilized in this manner must:

1. be employed by the district and observe the district’s policies for ethical behavior, which includes signing a test security confidentiality agreement,
2. complete all necessary training module(s), and
3. be assigned ONLY the role of screening administrator in the online testing system.

Handling of secure test materials

Orders placed for paper/pencil form test materials are shipped to each district office at least two weeks prior to the start of testing. These materials may NOT be copied or shared between districts. As a reminder, only

students with a documented need in an IEP or 504 Plan, or who have an approved religious exemption from online testing, may be administered paper/pencil test forms.

Prior to testing:

Paper test materials, including test tickets, must be kept in a secure location. Test administrators are to follow their school's approved test security procedures for the preparation, transfer and administration of secure testing materials.

During testing:

Test administrators must collect and account for all paper testing materials from each student prior to allowing students to leave the testing area. All secure testing materials must be immediately returned to the building test coordinator at the end of each testing session. This includes student test booklets, Directions for Administration (DFA), and any ancillary materials provided to students during the testing sessions (i.e., scratch paper and test tickets).

After testing:

At the close of the testing window, each and every item of secure test material is to be returned to the testing vendor by following the "Return Instructions" procedures included with the shipment. Test tickets and scratch paper must be shredded or securely disposed of.

Monitoring Testing Sessions

The Iowa Department of Education conducts periodic state-level monitoring of assessments to ensure the validity and reliability of student results. The Iowa Department of Education also requires that districts conduct annual local monitoring observations. The monitoring protocol includes the ELPA21 and Alt ELPA summative assessments.

Local Monitoring:

Within the testing window, at a minimum, the district must conduct two ELPA21 monitoring observations at any two levels (elementary, middle school, high school). One of the monitoring observations during the ELPA21 testing window should include students taking the Alt ELPA or utilizing accessibility and/or accommodations.

State Monitoring:

The Department will also conduct district monitoring visits of federally-required assessments, which include the ELPA21. The state monitoring occurs on a 5-year cycle and may be conducted on-site or virtually. The same form used for local monitoring will be used on state-level visits. All assessment monitoring forms are available on the [Student Assessment](#) webpage. For more information on test security and monitoring, refer to the [Iowa Test Security Manual](#).

Reporting Results

Individual Score Reports (ISRs) for both screening and summative assessments are to be shared with parents and maintained as follows [ESSA Sec. 1112(e)(3)(a) and Sec. 1112(e)(3)(b)]:

- The results of the assessment must be included in the annual EL services notification to parents and communicated to them in a language they understand, to the extent practicable, and
- One copy of the ISR or a summary of the results must be placed in or recorded in the student's cumulative folder.