

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); January 2015 Departments of Justice and Education Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents Sec. II-A (pages 10-12), Sec. II-H (pages 32-35)].

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.

Administering the Screener

- Any student new to Iowa (kindergarteners and students moving in from out of state) whose HLS indicates a language other than English has influenced the student's language development, 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.

Note: 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)].
- To meet the obligation to timely identify all EL students, school districts will need to assess potential EL students' English proficiency and identify non-proficient students as ELs as soon as practicable and well before the 30-day notice deadline, [Jan. 2015 Departments of Justice and Education Dear Colleague Letter: English Learner Students and Limited English Proficient Parents Sec. II-A (pages 10-12)].

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 the summative test will be administered.

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, became operational in the Spring of 2023. English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities are expected to take the Alt ELPA assessment to measure their progress in learning English. Students participating in the Alt ELPA will meet the state's annual English language testing requirement, and as a result, will 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 [Guidance: Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century](#).

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 coordinator. This must occur prior to beginning any part of the test. It is important to note that there are no exemptions from the test itself.

To request a domain exemption on the general ELPA21, contact Terri Schuster, ELPA21 Assessment Consultant, at terri.schuster@iowa.gov. For domain exemption requests for the Alt ELPA, use the Unique Accommodations request process as outlined in the [Statewide Assessment System Accessibility Manual](#), Tool 22.

- **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. 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 currently takes Iowa's 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, and
 4. The request for the exemption has been approved by the Iowa Department of Education through the Unique Accommodations Request Application.
- **Listening Domain:** 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 approved for an exemption from the listening domain of the general ELPA21, 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 listening practice test (note: sign language is not an allowable accommodation, except for signing the overall test directions), and
3. An exemption for the listening domain is documented in the IEP or the 504 Plan.

Note: Students taking the Alt ELPA are allowed the use of sign language, communication devices, and other communication supports which greatly reduce the need for a listening domain exemption. In the rare case that an IEP team determines that the listening 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.

- **Speaking Domain:** assesses production of spoken English, including correct use of English grammar. ELs who are deaf, hard of hearing, or mute, and unable to utilize a communication device, may be approved to receive an exemption from the speaking domain subtest of the general ELPA21, 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 acceptable accommodation, as scoring for the speaking domain includes use of correct grammar), and
 3. An exemption for the speaking domain is documented in the IEP or 504 Plan.

Note: Students taking the Alt ELPA are allowed the use of sign language, communication devices, scribes, and other communication supports which greatly reduce the need for a speaking domain exemption. In the rare 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.

- **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, the Alt ELPA, and as a result, will no longer need a writing exemption in most cases. In the rare case that an IEP team recommends a writing domain exemption for the Alt ELPA, 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 currently takes Iowa's 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, and
 4. The request for the exemption has been approved by the Iowa Department of Education through the Unique Accommodations Request Application.

Note: 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 Coordinator for guidance on exemptions for the Dynamic Screener.

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 either by being read aloud or signed by a test administrator who is fluent in the language. Translations may be provided by a human or the test platform. Translated directions are provided for some languages and can be found in the Resources folder of the ELPA21 portal. If a translation of directions is needed in a language not currently available, the LEA must complete the following steps:

1. Designate a person who will translate only the directions in the language desired. The person selected must be competent in both English and the desired language (using Google Translate or other similar service is not allowed).
2. The selected person must complete the online training course ELPA21 Dynamic Screener Training if they have the role of Screening Administrator in the Iowa Education Portal for the ELPA21 assessment application.
3. The selected translator must sign the Test Security Agreement, and a printed copy must be kept on file in the district office.

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, either because they are unable or unwilling to engage with the test, the resulting ISR will indicate a proficiency level of Proficiency Not Demonstrated and a domain profile of 0000. Students with this designation are considered eligible for English language instructional services in the state of Iowa.

Authorization to administer assessments

LEAs must ensure that educators administering the ELPA21 Dynamic Screener and Summative Assessment meet qualifications as required by the assessment instructions or the Iowa Department of Education. [ESSA Sec. 1111(b)(2)(G)(1); Iowa Code 281-60]. See below for required qualifications:

Summative Assessment

The ELPA21 Summative Assessment must be administered by an educator with a valid teaching license who has completed all necessary training module(s) for certification based on the student population being assessed. If paraeducators serve as test administrators, they must also hold a valid teaching certificate. The Iowa Teaching Standards govern ethical test administration practices, and to use non-certified personnel to administer the test is considered a violation of these standards.

Screening Assessment

In addition to trained, licensed educators who administer the summative, 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,
2. complete all necessary training module(s) for certification, and

3. be assigned ONLY the role of screening administrator in the online testing system.

Handling of secure test materials

Any printed secure test materials needed to administer the ELPA21 assessment are shipped to each district office as applicable at least two weeks prior to the start of testing. These materials may NOT be copied or shared between districts.

Prior to testing:

Paper test materials must be kept in a secure location. Test administrators are to follow their school's approved test security procedures for preparation of materials and delivery.

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

To ensure the validity and reliability of student results, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 includes the expectation that monitoring of test administration should be demonstrated for all assessments in the State system.

Local Monitoring:

During the test window, at a minimum, the LEA will conduct two ELPA21 monitoring observations at any two levels ES, MS, HS. One of those monitoring observations during the ELPA21 administration should include students taking the Alt ELPA or utilizing accessibility and/or accommodations.

State Monitoring:

The Iowa Department of Education will also be expected to conduct district monitoring visits of federally-required assessments. The same form will be used on these state-level visits. The state monitoring occurs on a 5-year cycle and the assessment to be observed may vary.

For more information on test security and monitoring, refer to the [Iowa Test Security Manual](#).

Reporting Results

Student 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)]:

- One copy of the ISR must be provided to parents with appropriate language translation, to the extent practicable, and
- One copy of the ISR must be placed and maintained in the student's cumulative folder.