

TOPIC: INITIAL IDENTIFICATION AND PLACEMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

This bulletin provides an overview of the requirements for identification, placement in language instruction education, parental notification, annual assessment of English proficiency, and required documentation related to newly enrolled students with limited English proficiency (LEP), also referred to as English Language Learners (ELLs). As required in state and federal laws, districts are responsible for the timely identification of ELLs, as well the timely notification of parents as to ELL placements.¹

IDENTIFICATION

A uniform initial identification procedure must be used with all students enrolling in a district. The recommended procedure to identify LEP/ELL students for language instruction educational programs is based on the following steps:

Step 1. Identification of LEP Students: Home Language Survey

A *Home Language Survey* is a district-developed tool to be given to all entering students and used to identify students who may not be proficient in English (a [sample Home Language Survey](#) is available online). The *Home Language Survey* is designed to identify, for possible further evaluation:

- Students who communicate in a language other than English; or
- Students whose families use a primary language other than English in the home; or
- Students who use a language other than English in daily non-school surroundings.

Note: Having another language spoken in the home or routinely used in other settings is *not* an automatic identification of a student as LEP/ELL. The preliminary evaluation conducted in the next step determines the students who should be referred for placement in a language instruction educational program.

Step 2. Preliminary Evaluation: Academic History

The student's academic history should be thoroughly assessed including:

- Academic records from within or outside the United States
- Course grades which, in relation to the student's grade level, indicate that lack of progress is due to limited English language acquisition
- Information on everyday classroom performance

¹ s.115.96 Wis. Stats. Bilingual-Bicultural Education and WI Administrative Rule Chapter PI 13 Limited-English Proficient Pupils <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/pi/pi013.pdf>, as well as various sections of the *Elementary & Secondary Education Act (ESEA)*, Title III-Part A, and requirements of the U.S. Office of Civil Rights.

An academic assessment may be administered to support educator judgment (e.g., locally developed, commercially available assessments, and/or reading inventories).

- If teachers' observations and poor academic performance indicate that there is a possible language barrier, then the student should be formally screened (refer to the W-APT screener information below) to determine the initial tier placement for English language assessment and assist in determining the student's initial English language proficiency (ELP) level.
- If the student's academic performance is on par with grade level peers, and there are no indications that limited English language proficiency has been a barrier to the student's learning, then this student does not need further evaluation of their English language proficiency. In such cases, the student should be given an ELP code 7 (fully English proficient, never ELL/LEP) in Wisconsin's Individual Student Enrollment System (ISES). These codes are used in mandated data collections and reporting, and as such, must reflect accurate district data.

Step 3. Screener Evaluation for Instructional Placement

Students with limited English language skills who have recently arrived in the United States, or are newly enrolled in the school district and are potential ELLs, should be formally screened to help determine whether or not the student is in need of a language instruction educational program.

The *WIDA-ACCESS Placement Test™*, or W-APT is Wisconsin's initial English language "screener."² The W-APT score should be used to determine the initial tier placement for English language assessment and assist in determining the student's initial English language proficiency (ELP) level.

Note: W-APT composite scores should be rounded down to a whole number to determine ELP levels (e.g., a 3.6 composite score is rounded down to language code ELP 3).

- If the student's *Grade Adjusted Composite Proficiency Level* on W-APT is less than ELP 6, then the student is identified as an ELL. The student should be offered an English language instruction educational program (also known as Bilingual, Bicultural, or English as a Second Language/ESL programs). The initial ELP code should be entered into in Wisconsin's Individual Student Enrollment System (ISES). These codes are used in mandated data collections and reporting, and as such, must reflect accurate district data.
- If the student scores a 6.0 on the screener, then the student is considered English proficient and no further ELP testing is warranted. In such cases, the student should be given an ELP code 7 (fully English proficient, never ELL/LEP) in ISES. These codes are used in mandated data collections and reporting, and as such, must reflect accurate district data.

² A brochure and detailed information on the W-APT are available on the WIDA website: <http://www.wida.us/assessment/w-apt/index.aspx>.

In sum, the screener serves to identify ELLs, and assists in placement into an appropriate language instruction educational program that meets the needs of the student. In addition, screener scores provide an initial tier/level placement on the annual ELP assessment, *ACCESS for ELLs*®. Finally, the ELP level determined on the screener identifies students as ELLs in student enrollment systems.

PLACEMENT IN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Once identification occurs, districts should base their placement decisions on a holistic profile that:

- Summarizes results of multiple assessments (i.e., tests, classroom assessments, interviews, and teacher observations),
- Includes parental input,
- Attends to the multidimensional aspects of English comprehension skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

Relationships among achievement scores, English language proficiency scores, and other relevant assessments should be examined to determine the student's interconnected educational and language development needs.

REQUIRED NOTIFICATION

ELL placement decisions must have a timely, built-in process for notifying parents and obtaining their permission for placement in language instruction educational programming. Schools must notify parents of children identified for participation in such a program no more than 30 days after the start of the school year. For a child identified as in need of an English language instruction educational program after the start of the school year, parents must be notified within two-weeks of placement in the program. For specific requirements see the [Overview of Parent Notification Requirements in NCLB](#).

ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Students identified as an ELL must be assessed using *ACCESS for ELLs*® during the next test administration window regardless of their participation in an English language instruction educational program. *ACCESS for ELLs*, Wisconsin's English language proficiency (ELP) examination, is a valid and reliable assessment of the progress and attainment of English language proficiency and is to be given each year that a student remains classified as ELL (ELP codes 1-5).

- ELL students must continue to take *ACCESS for ELLs*® until they score a 6.0 or are reclassified to an ELP 6 language code (former ELL).
- Students scoring an overall composite proficiency level of 5.0 or higher should be evaluated to see if they meet the reclassification (exiting) criteria. For those students who are qualified to be reclassified as fully English proficient, the district should follow procedures outlined in Bulletin 07.02, [Criteria for Reclassification of English Language Learners into Fully English Language Proficient Status \(Exiting\)](#).

ACCESS for ELLs[®] is a secure test with an annual test window beginning in early December and ending mid-February. For ELLs who are not present during the entire assessment window, districts must use other formal measures such as achievement test scores, and other relevant assessments where the student's speaking, listening, reading, writing, and comprehension in English can be evaluated to estimate the student's English language proficiency. In such cases, the district must manually enter an ELP code, aligned with the English language levels contained in Wisconsin statute,³ and reflecting the student's current functioning language level into ISES.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

Every student, when enrolling in a public school district, must be assigned a Wisconsin Student Number (WSN) and an initial English language proficiency (ELP) code. The initial ELP code is generally no higher than the student's screener result. Schools with ELL students (ELP codes 1-5) identified in the Wisconsin Individual Student Enrollment System (ISES) will automatically receive a pre-ID test label for use with the required *ACCESS for ELLs*[®] test. Note that the ISES data collections are open from August-October for districts to verify and correct ELP codes. District coordination between ISES administrators and program staff is essential to accurately meet assessment, accountability and public reporting requirements.

RESOURCES

For further information visit:

- [Bilingual/ESL Program](#)
- [English Language Learners: Standards and Assessments](#)
- [Accountability for English Language Learners \(ELL\)](#)
- [ACCESS for ELLs Test Calendar](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions – English Language Learner Assessment and Accountability](#)
- [ESEA Data Map for ISES, CWCS, WSLS](#)
- [Wisconsin Student Number Locator System \(WSLS\)](#)

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³ s.115.96 Wis. Stats. Bilingual-Bicultural Education and *WI Administrative Rule Chapter PI 13 Limited-English Proficient Pupils* <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/rsb/code/pi/pi013.pdf>.