Guidance for the Use of Benchmarks Toward Attaining English Proficiency

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# Introduction

The "Act Relative to Language Opportunity for Our Kids," [Chapter 138 of the Acts of 2017](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2017/Chapter138), commonly referred to as the “LOOK Act,” was signed into law by Governor Baker on November 22, 2017. The LOOK Act provides for greater flexibility in English learner education (ELE) programs, greater focus on individual English learner (EL) success, and better support for the academic achievement of ELs. As described in the LOOK Act, English language proficiency benchmarks for ELs support district staff to strengthen student outcomes for ELs learning English in ELE programs, including sheltered English immersion (SEI) programs and bilingual education programs, such as dual-language or two-way immersion (TWI), and transitional bilingual education (TBE). The English language proficiency benchmarks described in this document are individual targets for ELs to measure annual progress toward English proficiency.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (the Department) annually determines the English language proficiency benchmarks for individual ELs and provides them to each district every fall. The Department also provides English language proficiency assessment results for all ELs annually. Districts are required to:

* Adopt procedures to identify ELs who do not meet English proficiency benchmarks;
* Establish a process for the district to:
* Identify the areas in which identified ELs need improvement and establish personalized goals for attaining English proficiency;
* Assess and track the progress of ELs who did not meet benchmarks in the identified areas in need of improvement;
* Review resources and services available to assist ELs in the identified areas in need of improvement; and
* Incorporate input from the parents or legal guardian of the identified EL[[1]](#footnote-2).

The Department has developed these guidelines and an [English Learning Success Template](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/resources/benchmarks/default.html) (also in Appendix A) to support districts in assisting ELs who have not demonstrated sufficient progress toward English proficiency. The Benchmark Guidelines and the ELST are available in languages most commonly spoken in Massachusetts on the Department’s [English Learner Resources](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/resources/benchmarks/) webpage.[[2]](#footnote-3) The Department will review these guidelines, as well as the benchmarks and ELST, not less than every five years and will solicit public comment on each.

# Overview and Rationale

English learners (ELs) are students who do not speak English or whose native language is not English, and who are not currently able to perform ordinary classroom work in English. Districts and schools offer ELs supports and services in an English learner education (ELE) program to help them learn English and become proficient in speaking, listening, reading and writing English both in and outside of the classroom. Educators annually assess ELs’ English language skills in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening using the [ACCESS for ELLs ®](https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/access/tests) (ACCESS) tests[[3]](#footnote-4) until such time as the student is no longer classified as an EL.

The Department sets proficiency targets based on the expectation that ELs will attain English language proficiency within a six-year period.[[4]](#footnote-5) The Department provides districts and schools with benchmarks for individual ELs based on these targets in the fall of each year.

Districts and schools may use [the ELST](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/resources/benchmarks/default.html), also included as Appendix A, as a resource to assist ELs in meeting their benchmarks. When ELs are not meeting the benchmarks for achieving English language proficiency, districts should provide them supports necessary to accelerate progress.

# Proficiency Benchmarks

Under theEvery Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states must report on ELs’ progress in achieving English language proficiency. Title III of ESSA requires states to report the number and percentage of students who are “making progress” in achieving English proficiency[[5]](#footnote-6).

In Massachusetts, “making progress” means that a student is on track to attain English proficiency within six years of entering a Massachusetts school.

As such, the Department derived growth-to-proficiency targets (i.e., benchmarks) using a six-year period. A school district may consider a student *proficient* when they have achieved an overall composite score of Level 4.2 on the ACCESS test, based on a score scale that extends from Level 1.0 (the lowest level of proficiency) to Level 6.0. Students will continue to receive annual benchmarks for as long as they are classified ELs. For information regarding minimum criteria for exiting EL status, please see the Department’s [Guidance on English Learner Education Services and Programming](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/guidance/?section=guidance).

Each year that a student in grade K-11 is eligible to take the ACCESS test, the Department will provide a **future progress target** and **difficulty index** for the student for the following year. In cases where the student has taken the ACCESS test for *at least two consecutive years in consecutive grades*, the student will also receive a **student growth percentile for ACCESS** (SGPA) and a **progress indicator** (yes or no), as described below.[[6]](#footnote-7) The Department will not provide future progress targets for students in grade 12 since it is anticipated that they will no longer be enrolled in a K-12 program the following year.

* **Future progress target** represents the minimum ACCESS proficiency level score needed on next year’s ACCESS test to remain on track to reach English proficiency within a total of six years in a Massachusetts school. Future progress targets are reported as an ACCESS proficiency level, ranging from Levels 1.0 to 4.2.
* **Difficulty index** shows an estimate of how difficult it will be to reach next year’s target, relative to the student’s current proficiency level. The difficulty index ranges from 1–99, with one being the lowest difficulty (i.e., least difficult to achieve the target) and 99 the highest (i.e., most difficult to achieve the target). Students with difficulty indices greater than 60 have a high difficulty index. Educators should use the difficulty index as an indicator of which students may need additional instructional assistance in order to succeed.

For example, a student who has been in an ELE program for three years, but has a comparatively low ACCESS proficiency score (e.g., Level 1.5), would have a more difficult time meeting future targets and would therefore receive a high difficulty index e.g., 75). A student with a higher proficiency level after the same number of years in a program (e.g., Level 3.7) would likely receive a lower difficulty index (e.g., 35).

Higher difficulty indices signal that a student may require additional resources and hours per week in a language program to accelerate their language level and meet their target.

* **Student Growth Percentile for ACCESS (SGPA)** indicates the amount of progress made by a student on the ACCESS test from one year to the next, relative to other EL grade-level students who earned similar ACCESS scores the prior year. In general, SGPA indicates whether a student has made low, moderate, or high gains in their ACCESS test scores from one year to the next compared with other ELs in the same grade level who took the ACCESS test in two consecutive years. Like the difficulty index, the SGPA is a number from 1-99, with 40-59 representing *average* growth. Unlike the difficulty index, however, higher numbers of SGPA indicate *more* growth, whereas higher numbers on the difficulty index indicate greater difficulty in reaching the following year’s target. SGPA allows each student a nearly equal opportunity with other ELs in their grade level to demonstrate their progress in learning English.
* **Progress indicator**, either “Yes” or “No,” shows whether the student has met last year’s future progress target in the current year. If the student’s current ACCESS proficiency level score is equal to or greater than their future target from the previous year, then the student is considered to have made progress. For example:
* A student with a future target of 2.8 will “make progress” if his or her next ACCESS overall score is Level 3.0;
* A student with a future target of 3.2 will not “make progress” if his or her next ACCESS overall score is Level 3.0.

For students taking the [Alternate ACCESS](https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/alt-access), the Department will determine progress toward proficiency based on a comparison of the prior year’s results and the current year’s results to see whether the scores have increased by at least one proficiency level in one or more subdomains of the test.

Students in different ELE programs or with different levels or types of supports may demonstrate different rates of progress in attaining English language proficiency. For example, students in dual language programs may show different rates of acquiring English in the early years of their program than in later years of their program.

**How do districts get the ACCESS results?**

The results of the ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS assessments will be available electronically to schools and districts prior to the end of each school year in school and district DropBoxes in the Department’s Gateway Portal. Educators with appropriate permissions to view these reports in DropBox will enter their security credentials and passwords to view the ACCESS results and benchmarks when they become available. Schools will also receive printed reports in the mail.

# English Learning Success Template

The Department developed the English Learning Success Template (ELST) for use by districts to assist ELs in making progress toward English proficiency and meeting benchmarks in the future. The template identifies the steps that schools and districts can take to help students meet their goals and benchmarks. Districts may also consider incorporating their process for ensuring student success into the [Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfss/) process, if applicable.

# Resources and Data Available for School Districts to Identify and Monitor English Learners’ Progress

The Department makes available various data for districts to use in order to make instructional decisions for ELs. In addition to information regarding English language proficiency results and benchmark data provided by the Department each fall other resources are also available.

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## **Permission-protected Resources**

[**WIDA Assessment Management System (WIDA AMS)**](https://www.drcedirect.com/all/eca-portal-ui/welcome/WIDA)

The WIDA AMS provides student, school, and district ACCESS results annually to educators. It also includes data from previous years. ACCESS results are available to districts and schools prior to the end of each school year. District and school staff can use these results prior to the end of the school year to make placement and/or reclassification decisions and to communicate information to parents. Additional information about the data available in the WIDA AMS is included in Appendix B.

**Department’s** [**Gateway Portal DropBoxes**](https://gateway.edu.state.ma.us/edu/myportal/meoe)

Student data files in the [Gateway Portal](https://gateway.edu.state.ma.us/edu/myportal/meoe) DropBoxes provide student level data to district and school staff with the authority to view these files. Educators may disaggregate data by school- or grade-level results, and by language domain. This information can be useful in prioritizing the program areas in which to allocate resources and make staffing and programmatic decisions. Educators can also disaggregate the data to focus on students who are not making adequate progress in attaining English proficiency and determine appropriate interventions.

The data includes the results released in the WIDA Assessment Management System, as well as:

* Participation data
* ACCESS results
* Student Growth Percentiles for ACCESS (SGPAs)
* Progress indicators
* Future progress targets
* Difficulty indices

**Department** [**Security Portal Edwin Analytics**](https://gateway.edu.state.ma.us/edu/myportal/meoe)

[Edwin Analytics](https://gateway.edu.state.ma.us/edu/myportal/meoe) provides static reports such as the Student Profile Report, which can provide information on newly registered students or students who have transferred from another district. The report presents a student’s educational history, including all assessment results. Reports located in Edwin include:

* School and District Summaries (EL327)
* Student Rosters (EL627)
* Student Profile Report (PR600)
* Student Learning Experiences Reports (SE 321 and SE 322)

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## **Publicly Available Resources**

**Department’s Web Page for ACCESS Results**

The Department’s [ACCESS Results website](http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/access/results.html) allows districts and schools to view enrollment, participation, the number and percentage of ELs by proficiency level, progress, and attainment. Districts and schools can also review the data across schools and other districts to identify individual schools that require assistance. The website contains Excel Spreadsheets showing:

* ACCESS results by district
* ACCESS results by school

[**District Analysis and Review Tool (DART) for English Language Learners**](http://www.doe.mass.edu/dart/)

DART provides snapshots of district and school performance as to select data elements over time, and allows users to make comparisons with "comparable" districts or with the state. Available snapshots include:

* District and School Overview
* Annual Snapshot
* Curriculum and MCAS
* Achievement Gaps
* ACCESS for ELLs ® Trend
* ACCESS for ELLs ® Performance
* MCAS/ACCESS for ELLs ® Comparison
* Student Support

[**School and District Profiles - Title III Districts**](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/amao.aspx)

Title III districts can see a [summary list of Title III districts](http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/state_report/amao.aspx) and click on their own district for more detail to see whether they have met their Reporting Elements (and former Annual Measurable Achievement Objective (AMAO) targets).

* Summary list
* District details for Reporting Elements (and former AMAO targets)

**Other Toolkits and Data**

There are many other resources available on the Department’s website that are useful for making instructional decisions and understanding the performance of ELs, as well as the achievement of all students. These include:

* [Early Warning Indicator System (EWIS) Toolkit](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccte/ccr/ewis/)
* [District Data Team Toolkit](http://www.doe.mass.edu/accountability/toolkit/)
* [Turnaround Practices Research and Evaluation Reports](http://www.doe.mass.edu/turnaround/howitworks/reports.html)
* [How Do We Know Initiative](http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/howdoweknow/)
* [Educator Effectiveness Guidebook for Inclusive Practices](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/guidebook/)
* [Leading Educational Access Project (LEAP)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/leap/)

## **Methods for Providing Personalized Goals for English Learners Who are Not meeting English Proficiency Benchmarks**

The resources listed above can be useful tools for educators to determine EL students’ strengths as well as the types of supports they may require. Districts can review data for individual ELs as well as school-level and district-level data to identify trends and/or patterns that reveal how ELs are succeeding and where there may be room for improvement.

The [*Accelerating Students Who Are Behind Grade Level*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=25053) guidance document is a useful tool that focuses on how to meet the instructional needs of students performing below grade level. It focuses on how to best utilize the [*Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks*](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks) to catch students up and help them meet the grade-level standards. In order to do this, educators need to comprehend both the standards for the grade levels that they are teaching as well as the vertical progression of standards from previous grades. Understanding the skills and knowledge requirements in previous grade levels allows educators to more effectively support students’ mastery of current grade-level content. Standards may be “backward bundled” into lessons to efficiently maximize instructional time, such that a student who is behind grade level might be accelerated to be able to access grade-level content.

Districts also have access to annual accountability data, including progress for the English learner subgroup. When there are many ELs in the district not meeting their benchmarks, districts may want to consider looking more broadly at the resources and services available to the EL subgroup. Districts can use this information to determine possible improvement steps to ensure that ELs are progressing as expected in attaining English language proficiency.

Districts should consider allocating additional resources (instructional time, materials, and funding) to provide students with the supports they need, encourage teachers and other staff to engage students and work collaboratively to familiarize one another with students’ individual academic goals.

Districts that have identified patterns and taken steps to improve the overall performance of ELs, can realize systemic district level gains.

## **Sharing Best Practices in Assisting English Learners in Attaining English Proficiency**

Districts that are successful in improving the English language proficiency of their students are strongly encouraged to share those successes with other districts. Many forums exist for these exchanges, including the Department’s [Instructional Support Network](http://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/) meetings, [English Learner Education Leadership Networks](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/prof-learning/leader-network/), [MATSOL English Learner Leadership Council (MELLC)](https://www.matsol.org/mellc-registration) meetings, and [Dual Language Leadership Network](https://mabene.org/DLEN) meetings. Districts can use these opportunities to learn from similar districts about their successes as well as to engage with administrators and peers in seeking innovative ways to improve student outcomes. Another method of sharing best practices is for successful districts to encourage visits from neighboring districts to observe how a variety of ELE programs are implemented or how EL parent advisory councils are conducted.

In addition to sharing successes with colleagues, additional online resources available on the Department’s webpage may be useful:

* [Professional Development](http://www.doe.mass.edu/pd/)
* [ESL Model Curriculum Units](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/instruction/mcu/)
* [Center for Instructional Support](https://www.doe.mass.edu/instruction/)
* [Rethinking Equity in Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/retell/)
* [English Learner Education Program Guidance](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/guidance/?section=guidance)
* [Federal Grants (Title III Part A)](http://www.doe.mass.edu/federalgrants/titleiii-a/)

Other links outside the Department include:

* [IES What Works Clearinghouse – English learners](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/FWW/Results?filters=,EL)
* [National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition](https://ncela.ed.gov/)
* [ACCESS for ELLs](https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/access/tests)
* [Alternate ACCESS for ELLs](https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/alt-access)
* [WIDA](https://wida.wisc.edu/)
* [Colorín Colorado](http://www.colorincolorado.org/)

# Parent Notification and Engagement

According to the [LOOK Act](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2017/Chapter138), districts must adopt procedures to identify ELs who do not meet English proficiency benchmarks and establish a process that incorporates input from the parents or legal guardians of the identified EL. The LOOK Act requires districts to provide parents the Benchmark Guidelines, materials describing the benchmarks, and the ELST at the beginning of each school year or upon enrollment of the child in an ELE program. The district must provide these documents in the primary language of the EL. The Department recommends that districts also provide these documents in the parent’s preferred language if the parent’s preferred language is different from the EL’s primary language. The Department will make the Benchmark Guidelines and the ELST available in languages most commonly spoken in Massachusetts and will post them on the Department’s [English Learner Resources](http://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/resources/benchmarks/) webpage to assist districts with this effort.

The Department recommends that schools meet with parents periodically to review their child’s progress in learning English and share information regarding additional supports needed to help their child reach the English language proficiency benchmarks. Schools may also offer strategies for parents to help their child at home.

Schools and districts should continue to provide a welcoming environment and encourage parents to bring their questions and concerns to the attention of school staff. For example, parents should be encouraged to participate in the school/district’s open house, parent teacher conferences, parent advisory council and other forums to help the district learn more about the needs and concerns of parents.

# Appendices

## **Appendix A. English Learning Success Template**

[District Name] Public Schools strives to assist every English learner (EL) in attaining English proficiency.[[7]](#footnote-8) The district monitors the progress that ELs are making in meeting English proficiency benchmarks. For ELs who are not meeting English proficiency benchmarks, the district will:

* Identify areas in which the EL needs improvement;
* Establish personalized goals for the EL to attain English proficiency;
* Assess and track the progress of the EL in the identified areas in need of improvement;
* Obtain and incorporate input from the parents or legal guardian of the EL; and
* Review resources and services available to assist the EL.

In reviewing resources and services to assist ELs, our district may take the following steps:

* Evaluate strategies for improving instructional practices and routines for ELs;
* Provide additional support to teachers of ELs, including professional development and coaching;
* Examine the adequacy of the curriculum and materials available to teachers of ELs;
* Obtain supplemental materials designed to assist ELs who are struggling with attaining English proficiency;
* Establish language support teams that may include English as a second language (ESL) teachers, content teachers, school administrators, guidance counselors, and other relevant personnel.
* Support structured collaborative opportunities for teachers of ELs (ESL teachers and content teachers) to review student performance data regularly.
* Review resources provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/>

In addition to the specific steps above, our district may also consider the following:

* Successful approaches taken by schools to assist ELs and ways to adopt them;
* Development or improvement of the plan for addressing the instructional and social emotional learning needs of ELs;
* Implementation or continued implementation of English Learner Parent Advisory Councils;
* Examination of opportunities for increased family engagement, including taking additional steps to create an inclusive environment.

Our district also has available the following resources to assist ELs [*district to complete*]:

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## Appendix B: Data in the WIDA Assessment Management System

The available data in WIDA Assessment Management System (WIDA AMS) include:

| Score Report | Audience or Stakeholder | Types of Information | Potential Uses |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |
| Individual Student Reports | • Students  • Parents/Legal Guardians  • Teachers  • School Teams | Individual student scores in each language domain, plus four composite scores: Oral Language, Literacy, Comprehension, and Overall. | Share with students to set language goals, parents to demonstrate progress and attainment, and with all teachers who work with ELs in order to inform classroom instruction and assessment. |
| Student Roster | • Teachers  • Program Coordinators/ Directors  • Administrators | Scale scores and language proficiency levels for each language domain and composite scores by school, grade, student, tier, and grade-level cluster. | Share with administrators, teachers, and grade level teams of teachers to inform classroom instruction and assessment. |
| School Frequency Report | • Program Coordinators/ Directors  • Administrators | Number of students and percent of total tested at each proficiency level for each language domain and composite scores for a single grade within a school. | Share with district program coordinators/ directors and all building staff, use to inform building level programmatic decisions. |
| District Frequency Report | • Program Coordinators/ Directors  • Administrators  • School Committees | Number of students and percent of total tested at each proficiency level for each language domain and composite score for a single grade within a district. | Share with district staff, use to inform district level programmatic decisions. |
| District and School Student Response Files | • Program Coordinators/ Directors  • Administrators | Individual student’s demographic information, scale and proficiency scores for each language domain, and four composites | Explore and determine patterns in data, impacts of programming, spot trends, identify opportunities, and make data-informed decisions. |

1. [G.L. c. 71A, § 11](https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2017/Chapter138). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Spanish and Portuguese are the two most common languages other than English. Other languages may be provided as resources allow. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. ACCESS assessments are developed by WIDA, a consortium of member states based at the Wisconsin Center for Educational Research (WCER) at the University of Wisconsin. Massachusetts has been a member of the WIDA consortium since May 2012. The assessments are based on the WIDA English Language Development standards, which are aligned with the Massachusetts State Standards in English Language Arts. WIDA has also developed an Alternate ACCESS assessment to measure the English proficiency of students with significant cognitive disabilities. The Department administers the ACCESS tests during January and February each year to all ELs in grades K–12 whose education is publicly funded. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Research on time to English proficiency indicates that ELs typically require between four to seven years to attain English proficiency. The Department has determined that six years is a realistic and appropriate amount of time in which a typical EL can be expected to attain English proficiency, and this amount of time was therefore selected as the basis for the development of growth-to-proficiency targets. This expectation is used to develop targets, but does not affect the amount of time an EL can receive ELE services. Districts are required to provide ELE services to ELs until they demonstrate English language proficiency, even in instances where a student needs such services for a period longer than six years. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. See p. 37, question H-1 in the “Non-Regulatory Guidance: English Learners and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)” document found here: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essatitleiiiguidenglishlearners92016.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Students who were eligible to take the ACCESS test but whose test status for the current year is *absent* will receive a progress indicator of “no” and a future progress target and difficulty index based on the student’s most recent ACCESS test score or, if the student has no prior score, the minimum score for the test. Students with a test status of *absent* for the prior year who have an ACCESS score for the current year will receive a future progress target, difficulty index, and progress indicator, but those students will not receive an SGPA. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. English learner is a student who does not speak English or whose native language is not English, and who is not currently able to perform ordinary classroom work in English. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)