

**Guidance for Exiting Students Who Take the**

**Alternate ACCESS for ELs from English Learner Services**

**Background**

Students who are English learners (ELs) are classified as ELs until they demonstrate English language proficiency (ELP) using the state’s ACCESS for ELLs assessment and other additional data. While the vast majority of ELs take the ACCESS for ELLs assessment, a very small number of ELs with the most significant cognitive disabilities take the Alternate ACCESS assessment. This document outlines required statewide criteria for determining when an EL who takes the Alternate ACCESS assessment is ready to exit EL classification status.

The U.S. Department of Education’s Title III Office has strongly encouraged states to develop statewide processes for exiting students who take alternate English language proficiency assessments. Criteria for reclassification as a former EL (FEL) must include minimum scores on the Alternate ACCESS assessment and may include other state-defined considerations. Twenty-three states in the WIDA Consortium have already established statewide criteria for exiting ELs who take the ACCESS ALT assessment. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has developed the following method for required use by school districts for reclassifying ELs who participate in the ACCESS ALT assessment. This process is updated after the WIDA Consortium released the updated WIDA Alternate ACCESS assessment.

**Assessing and Evaluating ELs with Disabilities**

While this document focuses on the criteria for reclassifying ELs who take the Alternate ACCESS assessment, the larger context is that school districts have a duty to properly identify and serve all ELs with disabilities, including those with the most significant cognitive disabilities. For example, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), school districts must make sure that any “assessments and other evaluation materials used to assess a child under this section -- (i) are selected and administered so as not to be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis; (ii) are provided and administered in the child's native language or other mode of communication and in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the child knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is clearly not feasible to so provide or administer; (iii) are used for the purposes for which the assessments or measures are valid and reliable; (iv) are administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel; and (v) are administered in accordance with any instructions provided by the producer of the assessments.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

**Summary**

School districts must provide ELs with disabilities with both English learner education (ELE) services and special education and related services. School districts must provide ELE services to an EL with disabilities until the student meets all criteria for reclassification from EL status.[[2]](#footnote-3) Exiting from EL status is an important decision because a premature exit may place a student who still has linguistic needs at risk of academic failure, while unnecessary prolongation of EL status (particularly at the secondary level) may limit other educational opportunities.[[3]](#footnote-4)

The Alternate ACCESS is the state’s language proficiency assessment for the very limited number of ELs who qualify as among those with the most significant cognitive disabilities.[[4]](#footnote-5) For each such student, districts must **first** consider the results of the Alternate ACCESS to identify the student as a potential candidate for reclassification from EL status. If a student meets the minimum criteria on the Alternate ACCESS assessment, the School-Based Language Team[[5]](#footnote-6) must also consider English Language Proficiency Observation Forms completed by the student’s special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers to determine whether the student has achieved English language proficiency and is ready to exit ELE services.

In Massachusetts, an EL student who takes the Alternate ACCESS is eligible to exit ELE services and be reclassified as a former EL (FEL) when the student meets the criteria outlined in Table 1. Before exiting an EL student who took the Alternate ACCESS test from ELE services, the School-Based Language Team must determine that the student has achieved English language proficiency by meeting the criteria outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1. Criteria for Making Exiting Decisions for ELs**

**Who Take the Alternate ACCESS Assessment**

|  |
| --- |
| All of the following criteria must be met  for an EL student who takes the WIDA Alternate ACCESS assessment  to be eligible for reclassification as a former EL (FEL) |
| 1. The student musthave participated in the **Alternate ACCESS Assessment** and attained, at minimum, the following score: |
| 1. **The student must have participated in the Alternate ACCESS Assessment and**   **attained, at minimum, the following score:**     |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Grade Cluster** | **P2 Equivalent Scale Score Cut​** | | **K-2** | **959** | | **3-5** | **958** | | **6-8** | **964** | | **9-12** | **967** |      1. **The student must have achieved a score of 12 on the English Language Observation Forms completed both by the student’s special education teacher and ESL teacher.** The student must have achieved a score of 12 on the English Language Observation Forms completed both by the student’s special education teacher and ESL teacher. |
|  |

The School-Based Language Team should have strong two-way communication with parents/guardians of ELs about exiting decisions. If the parents/guardians have limited English proficiency, the School-Based Language Team must communicate with parents/guardians in their primary language about exiting decisions.

The School-Based Language Team must complete the [Reclassification Form](#Appendix1) for Alternate ACCESS,to be maintained by the district, documenting all of the data and information considered when determining that the student was ready to exit from EL status, including the scores on the Alternate ACCESS assessment.

If the School-Based Language Team has determined that the student is no longer an EL, the district must remove the EL classification and change the student’s language proficiency status in the next SIMS district report. Specifically, the district must:

remove the student’s coding as EL on the SIMS report to the Department (i.e., SIMS: DOE025 – record 00 under “Acceptable Values/Code Description”). Typically, this decision will be made before the start of the following school year, in time for the October SIMS data collection;

notify the parent/guardian of the change in the student’s classification;

update all school/district records; and

design and implement a process for routinely monitoring the students’ academic progress for four years.

**Monitoring English Proficiency and Academic Progress of Students**

**No Longer Classified as ELs**

Once a student is reclassified as a former EL (commonly referred to as FEL), the district must monitor the FEL's English language proficiency and academic progress for a total of four years.[[6]](#footnote-7) Schools serving FELs are strongly encouraged to consider:

assigning FELs, at least initially, to SEI endorsed teachers licensed in appropriate content areas;

providing regular, structured times for sheltered content area teachers, ESL teachers, and special education teachers to plan instruction collaboratively for FELs;

providing additional opportunities for the student to participate in small group instruction and learning throughout the school day, as well as after school and during the summer; and

designing and providing additional individualized learning supports and opportunities.

Districts should have a monitoring process. The monitoring process may include:

* regular, structured meetings that include an ESL teacher or language acquisition expert, the student’s content instruction teachers, the student’s special education teachers and related service providers and/or the School-Based Language Team to discuss the student’s academic progress;
* regular observations of student participation and performance; and
* conversations with the parents/guardians about the student’s academic performance and English language development.

The Department recommends that districts document monitoring efforts in writing. If some FELs fail to make academic progress, as measured by their grades, content area assessments, and IEP goals after their classification as ELs has been removed, and if the School-Based Language Team familiar with these students determines (through appropriate and documented assessments) that this failure is due to the lack of English language proficiency, then the district should re-classify such students as ELs and re-start ELE services. Districts must notify the parents/guardians of these students and document the reasons for the reentry.

**Appendix 1: Reclassification Form for WIDA Alternate ACCESS**

Please note: A written explanation is a required component of the reclassification process for students who have taken the Alternate ACCESS and who have met the criteria for reclassification. The sample below illustrates the needed components of a district’s written explanation of why it is appropriate to exit a student who took Alternate ACCESS from English learner status.

**NAME OF DISTRICT Public Schools**

**School Year 20\_\_-20\_\_**

**English Language Education Program Reclassification Form**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Name: | SASID#: | Date of Birth: |
| School: | Grade: | Reclassification Date: |

The student must meet the grade level scale cut score on the Alternate ACCESS for ELL to be eligible to be considered as Former English learner (FEL).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **RECLASSIFICATION CRITERIA** | | | |
| Meets Criteria | Student Grade Level | Student Cut Score on the Alternate ACCESS | Does Not Meet Criteria |
| The student, at minimum attained the following scale cut score for the student’s grade span.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **K-2** | **959** | | **3-5** | **958** | | **6-8** | **964** | | **9-12** | **967** | |  |  | *Students who do not meet the grade level scale cut score on the Alternate ACCESS cannot be considered for reclassification.* |
| The student’s special education teacher and ESL teacher each scored the student’s performance on the [English Language Observation Form](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/resources/access-alt-guidance-appendix2.docx) with a score of 12. |  |  | *If one of the English Language Observation Forms has a score of less than 12, the student does not meet the criteria for reclassification.* |

Based on these considerations, we have determined that the student is now ready to exit English learner classification status and be reclassified as a FEL. We understand that the district must monitor students who exit EL classification status for a period of four years and provide support as needed.

Please list the members and roles of the School-Based Language Team who collaborated on this reclassification decision:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Role** |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**APPENDIX 2: ENGLISH LANGUAGE OBSERVATION FORM**

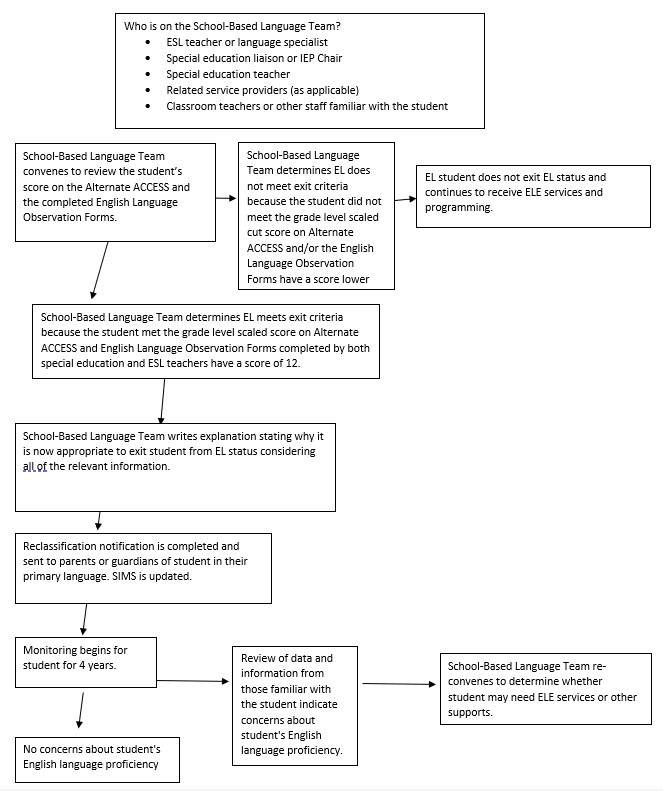
Student’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ SASID #: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| PRODUCTIVE | The student is able to produce general content words and expressions across content areas. (1 Point) |  |
| The student is able to produce social and instructional words and expressions across content areas. (1 point) |  |
| The student is able to produce formulaic grammatical structures. (1 point) |  |
| The student is able to produce repetitive phrasal and sentence patterns across content areas (1 point) |  |
| The student is able to produce phrases and short sentences. (1 point) |  |
| The student is able to produce emerging expression of ideas. (1 point) |  |
| RECEPTIVE | The student is able to process general content words and expressions, including cognates. (1 point) |  |
| The student is able to process social and instructional words and expressions across content areas. (1 point) |  |
| The student is able to process compound grammatical constructions. (1 point) |  |
| The student is able to process repetitive phrasal and sentence patterns across content areas. (1 point) |  |
| The student is able to process multiple related simple statements. (1 point) |  |
| The student is able to process an idea with details. (1 point) |  |
| **TOTAL** | |  |

Completed by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [Signature of Special Education or English as a Second Language Teacher]

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [Title]

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_



1. 20 U.S.C. § 1414(b)(3)(A); 34 C.F.R. § 300.304(c)(1). For more information about serving ELs with disabilities, please see the U.S. Department of Education English Learner Toolkit, Chapter 6, available at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/english-learner-toolkit/chap6.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. For more information about serving ELs with disabilities, please see the Department's [Guidance for Supporting ELs with Disabilities](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/guidance/disabilities.docx) and [ELs with Disabilities](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/disability.html) webpage. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Linquanti, R. (2001). The redesignation dilemma: Challenges and choices in fostering meaningful accountability for English learners. Policy Report 2001-1. Santa Barbara: University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute; Callahan, R., Wilkinson, L., Muller, C., & Frisco, M. (2009). ESL placement and schools: Effects on immigrant achievement. Educational Policy, 23, 355–384; Robinson, J.P. (2011). Evaluating criteria for English learner reclassification: A causal-effects approach using a binding-score regression discontinuity design with instrumental variables. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 33(3), 267–292. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. While the focus of this guidance document is on exiting ELs who take the WIDA Alternate ACCESS assessment, the Department will be providing additional guidance to school districts and IEP teams to assist them with determining whether an EL meets the definition of a student with the most significant cognitive disabilities and qualifies to take the WIDA Alternate ACCESS. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The School-Based Language Team making EL exiting decisions should at a minimum include an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher and/or language specialist, the student’s special education teacher, related services providers (as appropriate), Evaluation Team Leader/IEP team chairperson, and other relevant professional staff who may be familiar with the student. While the School-Based Language Team makes ELE exiting decisions, it in no way impacts the role of the IEP Team under state and federal special education laws. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. [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)](https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essatitleiiiguidenglishlearners92016.pdf)  (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Sep. 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)