



WIDA Assessment Frequently Asked Questions for English Learner Educators

This resource is designed to support English learner (EL) educators in navigating common questions that arise before, during, or after WIDA assessments. Although the District Assessment Coordinator (DAC) has primary responsibility for WIDA assessments, EL educators often play an important role by supporting or administering assessments, reviewing student results, identifying potential data issues, and communicating with students, families, and colleagues about assessment results. The specific responsibilities of EL educators vary by district and role. This resource includes guidance for EL educators who support different parts of the assessment process; not every topic will apply to every EL educator.

For guidance specific to your district or charter school, contact your DAC. To look up your DAC, use [the contact list](#) available at [MDE-ORG](#).

For additional support, contact the following teams at the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE):

- Statewide assessments: mde.testing@state.mn.us
- English learner programming: mde.el@state.mn.us
- Accountability: ESSA@state.mn.us
- Ed-Fi/MARSS: marss@state.mn.us

Use the sections below to find questions and guidance related to each stage of the assessment process.

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Before Testing

When does WIDA testing take place?

The statewide WIDA testing window typically spans eight weeks, beginning in late January or early February and ending in March. Annual testing calendars are posted on the [Statewide Testing page](#) of the MDE website.

The testing window is designed to maximize instructional time before testing while minimizing overlap with other statewide assessments. While the MDE sets the overall testing window, your DAC determines your district's specific testing dates.

Which students are required to take a WIDA assessment?

Participation requirements are based on a student's EL status in enrollment data submitted to MDE. All students identified as EL in grades K-12 are required by federal and state law to participate in an annual WIDA assessment. This includes:

- Students who are recently arrived ELs (RAELs) or newcomers.
- Students with disabilities, including those enrolled in transition programs.
- Students whose parents or guardians have refused EL services but who remain identified as ELs in student enrollment data.
- Shared-time students who receive EL instruction through a public school. These students are enrolled full-time in a nonpublic school or are home-schooled and attend public school for one or more classes during the school day.

What supports and accommodations are available for WIDA assessments?

WIDA assessments are designed with a multi-tiered accessibility framework to ensure that every student can demonstrate their English language proficiency accurately. Accessibility features include universal supports, which are available to all students, and accommodations, which are reserved for students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan.

Universal supports. Universal supports are accessibility features that tailor the testing experience to a student's needs without changing what the test measures. Examples include using highlighters or testing in a small group setting.

Accommodations. Accommodations are targeted supports that remove barriers without making the test easier. They are available only to students with an IEP or 504 plan. Examples include braille or speech-to-text. Some accommodations require advance preparation, such as ordering additional materials or enabling settings in WIDA AMS before testing.

Certain practices fundamentally change the language skills being assessed and therefore are never allowed because they would invalidate the assessment results. Prohibited practices include reading aloud any Reading

domain test content, using bilingual dictionaries, or translating test items. EL educators should work with their DAC to identify and plan for the supports and accommodations students will use during testing. Districts should have processes in place to ensure that needed supports and accommodations are identified, documented when required, communicated to Test Administrators, and provided consistently during testing. For detailed information about available supports and accommodations, refer to the *Accessibility and Accommodations Manual* on WIDA's [Accessibility and Accommodations page](#) of the WIDA website and the *Guidance for Universal Supports and Accommodations* on the [District Resources page](#) of the MDE website.

What should I do if a student cannot participate in one or more domains of a WIDA assessment?

For ELs with the most significant cognitive disabilities who meet participation criteria, WIDA Alternate ACCESS may provide a more appropriate measure of language proficiency. Eligibility is determined annually by the student's IEP team in collaboration with EL educators. The decision must be based on the student's individual needs and documented in the student's IEP. For detailed information about the participation criteria and decision-making process, refer to *Eligibility Guidance and Decision-Making Support for the WIDA Alternate ACCESS* on MDE's [Alternate Assessment Participation webpage](#).

ELs with disabilities should participate in as many domains of the WIDA assessments as possible. In limited situations, an IEP or 504 plan team may determine that a student's disability prevents the student from participating in a specific test domain. In these cases, a Special Education Deferred (SPD) code may be applied. Before applying an SPD code, the IEP or 504 plan team must determine that no available accommodation can provide the student with meaningful access to the domain. Contact your DAC for additional guidance about using SPD codes, including the possibility for eligible students to receive an alternate composite score calculation to inform EL reclassification and exit decisions.

How can students prepare for WIDA assessments?

The best preparation for WIDA assessments is high-quality, daily instruction aligned to the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards Framework. Students should also have opportunities to become familiar with the test format, technology, and any approved accommodations they will use during testing. Preparation should focus on helping students understand the testing experience, not on practicing test content or specific test-taking strategies. Students and families should understand the purpose of the assessment and how results are used to support students.

To help students become comfortable with the test environment before their actual testing day, WIDA provides test demos, test practice, and sample items for both [WIDA ACCESS](#) and [WIDA Alternate ACCESS](#). Encourage students to do their best and remind them that their results are used to understand their English language development and support instruction; they are not used as a grade or to determine whether students can access educational opportunities. If you have questions about your district's test preparation practices or family outreach, contact your DAC.

During Testing

Is testing required for a student who enrolls during the testing window?

Districts are expected to make every reasonable effort to assess EL students who enroll before or during the WIDA testing window. [Minnesota Standardized English Learner Procedures](#) require districts to complete the EL identification process for students who enroll after the start of the school year within two weeks of enrollment. The goal is to ensure every EL has an annual snapshot of their language proficiency to inform instruction, placement, and reclassification decisions.

For accountability purposes, students who are enrolled on the first day of the WIDA testing window and are identified as EL at any time during the school year must have an assessment record. If EL identification occurs too late to administer testing, the district must indicate the test as Not Attempted (NA) during Posttest Editing. This applies even if the student is identified as EL only after the testing window has closed.

If you become aware of a newly enrolled EL during the testing window, coordinate with your DAC to ensure the student is added to WIDA AMS, any testing completed in other Minnesota districts is accounted for, any needed materials are provided, and the appropriate testing plan is followed based on district procedures.

What if a student misses a scheduled testing session during the window?

Districts should make every reasonable effort to reschedule a missed session within the testing window. Districts must offer makeup sessions for students who miss their assigned testing session.

How do I maintain EL services throughout the WIDA testing window?

Districts are required to ensure that EL students receive appropriate language assistance services even while testing is underway. For additional guidance on supporting instruction during testing, see the [Guidance on English Learner Instruction During WIDA ACCESS and WIDA Alternate ACCESS Testing](#) webpage on MDE's website.

Is scratch paper allowed on the WIDA ACCESS Speaking domain?

Scratch paper is not allowed on the WIDA ACCESS Speaking domain. This policy is in place to ensure the validity of the results and to align with the core purpose of the assessment. The Speaking test is specifically designed to measure a student's ability to produce oral language in English. Allowing students to use scratch paper could allow them to script their responses before recording, which could affect the extent to which the assessment measures their ability to communicate orally and spontaneously in an academic context.

Why are test group sizes limited for Speaking and Writing domains?

Per WIDA recommendations, Minnesota requires districts to adhere to specific group size limits for the Speaking and Writing domains to ensure test security and provide an appropriate testing environment for students.

For the Speaking domain, the limit of **five students per Test Administrator** supports the following:

- Audio integrity: Maintaining sufficient space between students helps prevent microphones from picking up the voices of nearby testers, which is essential for accurate scoring.
- Student comfort and privacy: Smaller groups can reduce distractions and discomfort when students speak in front of peers.
- Active monitoring: Test Administrators must be able to monitor students closely to ensure they are responding appropriately and not using prohibited materials.
- Exceptions: Students taking the Speaking Tier Pre-A or the WIDA ACCESS Paper Speaking test must be tested individually.

For the Writing domain, the limit of **15 students per Test Administrator** supports the following:

- Student comfort and privacy: Students need enough desk space for their testing device and any required paper materials or scratch paper. Smaller groups can also help reduce distractions and support students' concentration during testing.
- Active monitoring: Test Administrators must be able to monitor students closely to ensure they are responding appropriately and not using prohibited materials.

After Testing

What are early student-level results?

Early student-level results are preliminary WIDA assessment results made available to districts before final state accountability processing is complete. These initial data sets typically become available in May. Their primary purpose is to allow schools to make timely decisions about EL instruction, placement, reclassification, and exit before official results are released in the fall.

These results are considered strictly preliminary because Posttest Editing has not concluded, data validation is ongoing, accountability determinations are not finalized, and delayed student records may still be in the processing pipeline.

These results are subject to a state embargo on public release. This means that results cannot be shared in any public forum until the MDE public release of results. Districts may use these individual results internally and may choose to share them with individual students and their families. Districts choosing to share early results must communicate that these results are preliminary and subject to change.

What is Posttest Editing?

Posttest Editing is a three-week window that happens after testing is completed. During this time, districts review, validate, and correct assessment data in the Test Web Edit System (Test WES) before final results are reported. The goal of Posttest Editing is to have each student's enrollment record accurately connected to the assessment records for each test the student took. Enrollment records are the individual student records with demographic information imported into Test WES from MARSS/Ed-Fi submissions.

In Minnesota, this window opens in May after the Minnesota Standards-Based Accountability Assessments (MCA/MTAS/Alt MCA) are complete.

Key Posttest Editing tasks include:

- Reviewing and correcting demographic and enrollment information, including EL status. This commonly includes resolving split records, where a student's test record is divided across two score reports.
- Indicating why a student did not test by adding test codes such as Absent (ABS) or Declined (DEC).

Issues that are not addressed during Posttest Editing may lead to delayed reporting or could result in the invalidation of student results.

Your DAC is responsible for official changes within Test WES. Not all EL educators participate in posttest editing. In some districts and charters, EL educators may assist in verifying that every tested student has a complete, accurate data record before final reporting.

Why might a student's results be delayed or missing?

Results for individual students or schools can be delayed due to administrative or technical issues. Common reasons for delayed results include:

- Late material returns: Paper test materials are shipped back to the vendor (DRC) after the state deadline.
- Labeling errors: Missing student labels or incorrectly bubbled demographic information on paper test booklets can prevent accurate scanning.
- Data discrepancies: If a student's assessment record does not exactly match their official enrollment record, the score may be held until the discrepancy is resolved during Posttest Editing.

Issues resolved during Posttest Editing may result in updated results in the District and School Results (DSR/SSR) files released over the summer. Other delayed results may be available in "straggler files," which contain late batches of student results.

For eligible students with one or two domains indicated as Special Education Deferred (SPD), alternate composite calculations may be provided for reclassification and exit decisions. Your DAC will be notified when any alternate composite calculations are available.

What are the criteria for EL reclassification and exit?

Reclassification and exit decisions are based on criteria established in Minnesota Standardized EL Procedures. Full information is available on the [English Learner Education webpage](#) of the MDE website.

How should I explain a student's WIDA results to their family?

WIDA's [Engaging Families and Communities webpage](#) provides extensive resources to support family communication, including letters, handouts, and flyers in several languages. *Parent Fact Sheets* are available on the [Minnesota Assessments for English Learners page](#) of the MDE website.

What if a student's scores look wrong?

Many perceived scoring errors are caused by data discrepancies that can be resolved during posttest editing. First, verify that the student took the correct test for their enrolled grade, that no test codes were applied, and that the student is correctly identified as an EL in enrollment data submitted to MDE.

A common misunderstanding occurs when attempting to verify a student's overall composite proficiency level by weighting domain proficiency levels. The overall composite scale score is calculated using weighted domain scale scores, and that composite scale score is then used to determine the overall proficiency level.

It is important to remember that assessment results are a snapshot of proficiency at one point in time. WIDA and MDE recommend using assessment scores as only one of multiple pieces of evidence, alongside classroom work, formative assessments, and teacher observations, to build an overall picture of a student's language development.

For WIDA ACCESS (grades 1-12) only, if there is a specific concern that a Writing or Speaking response was scored incorrectly by the test vendor, a scoring appeal can be requested. A scoring appeal must be submitted through your DAC. Because of rigorous quality controls, scoring appeals rarely result in a score change.