THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages
Associate Commissioner

Office of State Assessment
Assistant Commissioner

TO: District Superintendents
Superintendents of Public Schools
Superintendents of State-Operated and State-Supported Schools
Leaders of Religious, Independent, and Charter Schools
Principals of Schools Assessing English Language Proficiency
Directors of Regional Bilingual Education Resource Networks
Educators of English Language Learners

FROM: Elisa Alvarez, Associate Commissioner – Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages

SUBJECT: WIDA English Language Proficiency Assessments: Considerations for Instruction and Programmatic Decision-Making for English Language Learners in New York State

DATE November 10, 2026

As New York State (NYS) transitions to the WIDA English language proficiency (ELP) suite of assessments for its English Language Learners (ELLs), districts and schools should be aware of the changes to ELP assessments beginning in the 2026–27 school year. The October 2025 memo released by the NYS Education Department informed the field of this transition to WIDA. This memorandum provides an overview of NYS's transition to WIDA assessments and guidance on using the assessments to support English language development and promote access to grade-level content and learning standards for ELLs. It also provides information to support instructional and programmatic decision-making. **While the State's English language proficiency assessments are changing, NYS's instructional expectations for ELLs are not.** Districts and schools will continue to use New York's existing approved resources, grounded in the principles of the Blueprint for English Language Learner Success, to guide instruction.

As part of this transition, districts and schools will administer *WIDA ACCESS* and *WIDA Alternate ACCESS* to measure the English language proficiency of ELLs, including students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. For most ELLs, this replaces the State's paper-based ELP assessments with adaptive, computer-based assessments. *WIDA Alternate ACCESS* expands assessment options by providing an assessment appropriate to the instructional needs of eligible ELLs with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Refer to the WIDA Alternate ACCESS Participation Decision Tree for New York for more information.

Districts and schools will continue to use the *New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL)* for ELL identification and placement. Beginning in Fall 2027, districts and schools will administer *WIDA Screener* and *WIDA Alternate Screener*, as needed, to

determine ELL status for newly enrolled students. Additional information regarding professional development for the screener will be available starting, Spring 2027.

NYS districts and schools will continue to provide instruction aligned with the New York State Next Generation Learning Standards and the Academic and Linguistic Demands: Creating Access to the Next Generation Learning Standards in English Language Arts for Linguistically Diverse Learners (ALDs). The ALDs remain NYS's English language development framework and will continue to guide instruction for ELLs across grade levels and content areas. This fall, NYSED and the Regional Bilingual Education Resource Networks (RBERN) will provide professional development and guidance to support educators in connecting the ALDs with information from WIDA assessments.

Although NYS is implementing WIDA ACCESS assessments, it will continue to use the same five English language proficiency levels: Entering, Emerging, Transitioning, Expanding, and Commanding. Concurrent with the release of the 2027 WIDA results, NYSED will provide a crosswalk explaining how WIDA assessment results correspond to these levels, which will continue to determine English as a New Language (ENL) services, bilingual education (BE) services, and other programmatic decisions under Commissioner's Regulations Part 154. Districts should use the official NYSED crosswalk when interpreting WIDA assessment results for instructional planning, placement decisions, and ENL and bilingual education mandated services.

NYSED has released a new guidance document, Frequently Asked Questions on the Implementation of the WIDA ACCESS English Language Proficiency Assessments in New York State to support district and school leaders' seeking basic information on these new assessments. Topics addressed include an overview of the WIDA assessment program, information on how to prepare for and support schools during the assessment, required systems and technology to administer the WIDA assessments, participation requirements, administration, and scoring.

Districts should ensure that their families are informed of the upcoming change and what it will mean for their children's ENL or BE services. Schools may wish to make use of the resources that WIDA provides on the Engaging Families and Communities page of their website. This page includes links to letters and handouts that introduce families to the WIDA ACCESS assessments.

NYS districts and schools should consult official state guidance and available WIDA assessment manuals, technical documentation, and implementation resources. For additional assistance, contact:

- WIDA Client Services Center at 866-276-7735 or help@wida.wisc.edu for questions about WIDA assessments or any of the resources on the WIDA website,
- Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) Customer Service at 855-787-9615 or WIDA@datarecognitioncorp.com for questions about technical assistance,
- The Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages (OBEWL) at 518-474-8775 (statewide), 718-722-2445 (NYC), or OBEWL@nysed.gov for state ELL policy guidance.
- The Office of State Assessment (OSA) at 518-474-5902 or emscassessinfo@nysed.gov for assessment policy guidance, or

- The Office of Special Education at 518-473-2878 or speced@nysed.gov for special education services and supports for students with disabilities policy guidance or
- Your local Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN) for instructional support.

WIDA also provides New York-specific information through its New York State member page and the WIDA in New York email newsletter. Educators and administrators are encouraged to sign up to receive this newsletter to help you prepare to administer WIDA ACCESS.