

## This report addresses three primary questions:

1. How do you determine a meaningful English language performance standard?
2. How do you establish a realistic, empirically anchored time frame for attaining a given ELP performance standard?
3. How can states take into account English learners' English language performance level when setting academic progress and proficiency expectations?

To answer these questions, a large national dataset from WIDA and non-WIDA states was used. The goal was to create generalizable methods for addressing these three questions.

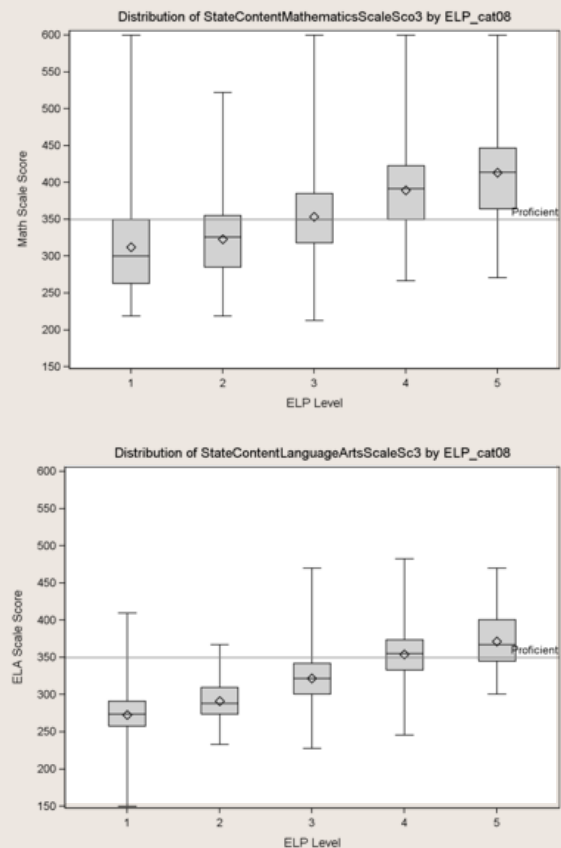
### Question 1 Determining a meaningful English language performance standard

Two assumptions are made in addressing this question. The first argues that a meaningful, positive relationship exists between ELP and content assessments. Understanding this relationship supports the identification of English language proficiency. The second assumption states that students' English language proficiency level becomes less related to content achievement as students approach language proficiency.

Figure 1 shows that as ELP level increases the proportion of students scoring above the proficient line also increases—confirming the first assumption. A slightly adapted restatement of the second assumption might be that English proficiency should be at a point where a majority of students are above the proficient line. Notice that for the mathematics test that point is at level 3, and for the ELA test it occurs at level 4. If this were the only set of graphs used to set English proficiency, the recommended level would be somewhere between levels 3 and 4. Certainly, all grades with available data should be used in establishing the English proficiency level.

**FIGURE 1.**

Boxplots of the relationship between a 4th grade English language arts and mathematics assessments and ELP levels from an ELP assessment in state A.



## Question 2

### Establishing a realistic, empirically anchored time frame for attaining an ELP performance standard

Policymakers and ELL educators have long been concerned with how long it takes to attain English proficiency. In this report, researchers focused specifically on how long it takes ELLs at different ELP levels to attain proficiency. The not so surprising finding is that students at lower language proficiency levels take longer than students at higher language proficiency levels. The report found that it takes ELLs at beginning levels of English language proficiency between 5 and 7 years to gain an English proficiency performance standard. For intermediate level students, it can take as little as 2 years. This finding is consistent with what other researchers have found. However, there are several limitations. One is that only ELLs' initial language proficiency level was used to estimate time to English proficiency. There are certainly other factors that influence how long it takes, e.g., ELLs' exposure to education in their home country, first language literacy, language support outside school, language program type. Another limitation is that researchers looked at how long it takes to attain an English proficiency standard, which is not the same as determining how long it should take. It would be safe to assume that it doesn't or shouldn't take all beginning ELL students 7 years to attain an English proficiency nor that all intermediate students should take 2 years.

## Question 3

### Using English language proficiency level in calculating AMOs

In Figure 2, we see that the numbers of ELLs attaining proficiency on content assessments at the two lowest language proficiency levels is very small. This pattern is consistent across states, grades, and ELP and content assessments. Given that schools, districts and states are held accountable for the percentage of students attaining content proficiency, this can be a problem for schools or districts with high numbers of ELLs at low English proficiency levels. The methods outlined in this report attempt to compensate for this disparity. All methods are successful in adjusting content proficiency scores with varying degrees of effectiveness. Also all methods make big assumptions that effect outcomes. There is one critical point that needs to be kept in mind, “[a]djusting content scores based on language proficiency level alone is insufficient.... Students are expected to grow in their ELP and those time-based expectations should be factored into content score adjustments (pp.48, 49).” Adjustments to ELLs' content scores based on language proficiency level should occur only for a limited time period. The figure shows an example timeline. The lowest level students are provided with four years of content score adjustments. Note that in year two Level 1 students receive the Level 2 adjustment even if they are still a Level 1.

**FIGURE 2.**

From report: Exhibit 19. Expected English-Language Proficiency (ELP) Level Growth, by Year in State School

ELP Level	Expected ELP Level by Year in School			
	Initial Year	2nd Year	3rd Year	4th Year
Level 1	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Level 2	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Proficient
Level 3	Level 3	Level 4	Proficient	-
Level 4	Level 4	Proficient	-	-

Exhibit reads: EL students starting at ELP Level 1 in the initial year are expected to move to Level 2 in the 2nd year, Level 3 in the 3rd year, and Level 4 in the 4th year, whereas students starting at ELP Level 4 at outset are expected to become English Language proficient in the 2nd year.

The intent of this timeline is to assure that students are provided with level adjustments based on their expected proficiency level progress, not necessarily their actual proficiency level. The methods shown here make many critical assumptions, and different assumptions will most certainly affect outcomes.

Throughout this report, researchers argue that stakeholder groups should be involved in making decisions about what approach to adopt and how it should be employed. The report's authors also make clear that the methods are not exclusive and are meant to “stimulate discussion and experimentation among education agencies (p.69).”

Read the full report: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, National *Evaluation of Title III Implementation Supplemental Report Exploring Approaches to Setting English Language Proficiency Performance Criteria and Monitoring English Learner Progress*, Washington, DC, 2012.  
[www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/implementation-supplemental-report.html](http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/title-iii/implementation-supplemental-report.html)

Contact: H. Gary Cook, Ph. D., [hcook@wisc.edu](mailto:hcook@wisc.edu), (608) 890-0471