



## English Learner Identification of Kindergarten Learners: Implementing WIDA Screener for Kindergarten

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**This study examines decision makers, criteria, and procedures of kindergarten English learner identification within a U.S. state, in view of WIDA Screener for Kindergarten.**



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# English Learner Identification of Kindergarten Learners: Implementing WIDA Screener for Kindergarten

## Research Summary

WIDA introduced the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten (hereafter, K Screener) in 2021. This working paper presents findings from a two-phase, mixed-methods study exploring the decision makers, criteria, and procedures of kindergarten English learner (EL) identification within one U.S. state, with specific attention to the K Screener.

In Phase I, 133 educators (from a total of 118 distinct districts in the aforementioned U.S. state) completed an online survey exploring EL identification practices in Fall 2022. Findings indicate variation in the EL identification process at the kindergarten level across districts. Multiple educators were involved in the process, including EL/bilingual teachers, district EL coordinators, and EL/bilingual program directors. Nearly 40% of the time, identification decisions were made by a single district-level administrator. In terms of tools and criteria, districts used multiple types of data and tools to identify potential ELs, including but not limited to, the home language survey (HLS), an English language proficiency (ELP) screener, parent/guardian input, teacher input, classroom observation of students, home visits, and students' prior educational history.

The majority (83.5%) of the survey respondents indicated that they adhered to the state guidelines by using the HLS to identify students who were exposed to a language other than English, and then assess their ELP using an ELP screener. Most districts used the same HLS provided by the state (88.4%) and used the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten (90%). Note that educators had suggestions for further improving the HLS and shared questions that they would like to be added to the HLS (see Table 21). For districts that used the K Screener, most districts (97%) reported similar criteria as the state's: a minimum score of 5.0 on both the Listening and Speaking domains in the first semester of kindergarten. However, approximately 35.6% reported that they believed the cut score should be lower and some expressed concerns about the K Screener (see Table 29). For example, educators thought that the screener was unforgiving of mistakes and the cut score was too high even for native English speakers.

In terms of educators' perceived effectiveness of identification decisions, educators believed that misidentifying non-ELs as ELs (54.2%) was more likely than misidentifying ELs as non-ELs (21.3%). That is, overidentification was perceived to have occurred across districts. Some potential sources of misidentification included inaccurate responses to the HLS, insufficient information collected by the HLS, student characteristics (e.g., shyness), and strict state requirements for the assessment cutoff scores. Potential ways to address misidentification included consulting parents, collecting teacher input or evaluation, referring to students' academic performance data, and readministering an ELP assessment. In terms of

potential improvements for the kindergarten EL identification process, educators requested more enhanced resources regarding ELP assessments (e.g., accommodations that are appropriate for students with varying disabilities), more detailed guidelines on EL identification (e.g., specific guidelines on misidentification and procedures to address it), and more training from their state education agency (e.g., guidance on how to work with students who might have disabilities).

In Phase II, a case study approach was used to explore the EL identification practices of three different districts (one small, one medium, and one large in terms of EL enrollment). Educator survey and interview data, and students' HLS and screener scores were analyzed. All three districts reported that they adhered to the state's guidelines where they used both the HLS and ELP assessment to screen and identify EL students. Some variations in the kindergarten EL identification process included the ways they collected HLS data (online vs. paper format), the data educators used to make decisions (ELP assessment only vs. multiple types of data), and the ELP assessment used by the district in the 2022–2023 school year (transition to K Screener from WIDA MODEL for Kindergarten and other assessments). Educators from all three districts also shared some similar concerns: high cut scores and additional factors that may affect students' performance on the ELP assessment (e.g., familiarity with the test administrator, students' personalities, and special needs). In terms of suggestions for improving the EL identification process in their respective districts, educators shared several ideas: collecting more student data from different sources and administering the assessment in a familiar setting or with a familiar test administrator.

Although this study investigated kindergarten EL identification in a single state, findings of this study have important implications for educational policies and practices regarding kindergarten EL identification. The study highlights the need for a comprehensive identification process that considers various factors beyond language proficiency on the screener, such as learners' special needs. Educators also discussed concerns related to non-language factors affecting student performance on the K Screener, such as students' personality (shyness) or familiarity with the test administrator. Furthermore, findings from Phase II suggest that some districts may have pre-K screening that may affect the screening or non-screening of potential kindergarten ELs, which should be further explored in future studies. These insights provide a good starting point for discussion and further research to disentangle the issues on kindergarten EL identification.

# Introduction

New potential English learners (ELs)<sup>1</sup> in U.S. K–12 educational settings are screened using various criteria, including an English language proficiency (ELP) assessment (e.g., the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten). Although states and districts provide guidelines for making identification decisions, few studies (Kim et al., 2018) have examined how educators make decisions at the district and school level. EL status can have a significant impact on a child’s education and future (e.g., Carlson & Knowles, 2016), and can be impacted by teacher bias (Riley, 2020) and a state education agency’s (SEA’s) choice of assessment and decision rules (Carroll & Bailey, 2016). As such, it is important to holistically understand the factors involved in the identification decision-making process to ensure that ELs are appropriately identified. Surveying and interviewing educators who make decisions regarding EL identification and examining the EL identification criteria (i.e., instruments and sources of information) used in local contexts, therefore, are important steps to better understand current EL identification practices in the United States.

To meet federal and state requirements, as well as serve ELs’ needs, several ELP screeners have been specifically designed for use with kindergarteners. Until 2021, the WIDA Kindergarten Placement Test (Kindergarten W-APT) had been most widely used among states that are members of the WIDA Consortium, which is an educational consortium of state departments of education dedicated to supporting multilingual learners in K–12 contexts (WIDA, 2023). In order to update the Kindergarten W-APT and W-APT (grades 1–12), WIDA recently replaced both tests, introducing the WIDA Screener for grades 1–12 in 2016, and the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten (K Screener) in 2021. Other kindergarten screeners used in the United States include ELPA21’s computer-based kindergarten screener (Sato & Thompson, 2020) and Arizona’s paper-based screener (Arizona Department of Education, 2022). Each screener helps identify students who require additional English language support.

As discussed above, an ELP screener is used as one of the criteria in identifying ELs. Due to the novelty of the K Screener, SEAs first determined the new criteria (proficiency level scores) to be used to identify ELs and gradually implemented it in their respective states. A unique aspect of K Screener practices is that the domains tested can vary depending on the semester during which it is administered. Considering the young age of kindergarten learners, in many states<sup>2</sup>, the Listening and Speaking domains are administered in the fall semester, and all

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<sup>1</sup> We use *EL* throughout this report as it is the terminology used by the federal government, but the field has adopted new terminologies, such as emerging bilingual learners or multilingual learners.

<sup>2</sup> States could administer K Screener from as early as April and continue using it year-round for new incoming students. Also, two domain- (Listening and Speaking) versus four-domain (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) administrations are state policy decisions.

four domains are tested for incoming kindergarteners during the spring semester. This, coupled with the heterogeneity of the incoming Kindergarten population (e.g., where some have been enrolled in early care or other educational settings), poses additional considerations for policymakers in creating and implementing EL identification policy.

In addition to understanding the factors and the decision-making process involved with EL identification, it is necessary to examine the appropriateness of the decisions as they often have significant consequences on student outcomes (Johnson, 2020; Umansky, 2016). Moreover, it is important to understand the extent of misidentification and how it is addressed by stakeholders. Misidentification can take place under two broad categories: (a) ELs can be misidentified as non-ELs (known as *false negative*), and (b) non-ELs can be misidentified as ELs (also known as *false positive*). While one can speculate on various reasons why misidentification can occur due to EL identification tools and student factors, a comprehensive study on this phenomenon has yet to be conducted. Understanding the kindergarten EL identification process and the appropriateness of the decisions made could support validity evidence for the decisions made using the new K Screener [see Assessment Use Argument for ACCESS for ELLs by Kim et al. (2018) for more details]. One of the main claims of K Screener is that test users can make appropriate identification decisions using the assessment. In addition, the findings may help states to improve EL identification policy and practices, and better communicate their policies to their districts and schools. For instance, study results could inform policy by guiding states and districts to consistently apply the criteria for decision-making and promote equity in EL learning opportunities.

## Literature Review

### Identifying English Learners

In the United States, state education agencies and local educational agencies (LEAs; school districts and private, charter, and parochial schools within their boundaries), have a legal obligation of providing appropriate language support services to ELs. According to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), reauthorized as the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), LEAs are responsible for accurately identifying ELs in a timely manner (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Affirmative steps, including proper identification, must be taken “to ensure that students with limited English proficiency...can meaningfully participate in their educational programs and services” (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). Thus, it is of great importance for educators to accurately identify ELs who need language support services in a timely, valid, and reliable manner (*Castañeda v. Pickard*, 1981; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015).



Within the United States, SEAs have the authority to decide how to best meet federal K–12 guidelines. In terms of assessments, SEAs can decide which ELP assessments will be used within their borders (Beck & Muhammad, 2021). This can open the door to variation across state lines in terms of which tests are administered, which cut scores are established, and what this may mean for students who transfer from one state to another during their educational career. Although the instruments and procedures used in the identification of EL students vary across states and school districts, the process typically includes a home language survey (HLS) and an ELP assessment (Lopez et al., 2016). At the time of enrollment, parents/guardians of incoming K–12 students are given an HLS, which asks questions about a student’s language background (e.g., language that the student first acquired, language that the student uses most often, language(s) used at home). These surveys vary by state, and in some states, even by school district (Lopez et al., 2016). Information gathered from the HLS is used by schools and districts to identify students who should take an ELP assessment (Bailey & Kelly, 2013; Lhamon & Gupta, 2015; Rossell, 2006). That is, the HLS narrows down the K–12 population to a smaller pool of students who are potential ELs given their language experiences at home, such as using a language other than, or in addition to, English (Bailey & Kelly, 2013; Linqunti et al., 2016). These surveys are not without issue as HLS vary greatly in purpose, content, procedures, and interpretation. These variations in HLS may affect the accuracy of information, ultimately contributing to the under- or overidentification of students (Bailey & Kelly, 2013).

The ELP assessment that is used for EL identification is often referred to as a screener. Screeners measure students’ level of English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and determine whether a student should be classified as an EL or considered as an Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEP) student (Shin, 2018). Students who are identified as ELs qualify for language support services and, unless the parents/guardians choose to opt out of EL services, are appropriately placed into the school’s language instruction educational program (LIEP). IFEP students, on the other hand, do not require specialized support services, as their test scores indicate that they have sufficient English language proficiency to meaningfully participate and succeed in school (Lhamon & Gupta, 2015, Linqunti et al., 2016).

### ***Appropriateness and Variation in EL Identification Measures***

While there is little disagreement over the need for EL identification measures, several concerns have been raised regarding the appropriateness of such measures. HLSs, for instance, have been criticized for the type of questions that are included and whether such questions reveal valid information about students’ language background (Abedi, 2008; Bailey & Kelly, 2013; Salerno & Andrei, 2021). In certain cases, general questions that ask about the dominant language used at home (which may be the language adults use to communicate with each other but not a language that the child speaks) or the language that the child first acquired (which may be a language that the child no longer uses) can lead to misidentification of potential ELs (Linqunti et al., 2016). Experts recommend that SEAs and LEAs ask questions that focus on

the *child's current language dominance* and the *degree of exposure to English* when using an HLS for initial identification of potential ELs (Bailey & Kelly, 2013; Linqunti et al., 2016).

The validity and reliability of ELP screeners is also of great concern, as educators heavily rely on the test results to determine whether a student should be classified as an EL or an IFEP student. The screeners undergo rigorous field testing and validation procedures before they are operationalized to ensure the quality of the assessment. As such, states may decide to join an ELP assessment consortium (e.g., WIDA Consortium, ELPA21 Consortium) to implement high quality assessments.

Another issue commonly brought up is the different EL identification criteria and procedures used by states and school districts. The criteria or sources of information (e.g., items that are asked on the HLS, the cut score selected for EL identification, and the importance given to individual language domains, could vary across states and districts. In addition, although states and districts provide guidelines for making EL identification decisions, the actual decision-making practices and procedures at the district and school level may differ. For example, in some districts there could be a single decision-maker, whereas others may have a group of educators that are involved in EL identification. Such variation makes it challenging to compare EL identification decisions across districts and states. Therefore, it is important to gather empirical evidence to better understand current EL identification praxis.

Notably, it is possible for a student with borderline ELP assessment results to be classified as an EL in one state and an IFEP student in another due to different cut scores or ELP standards/criteria (Linqunti et al., 2016). For instance, Colorado specifies that kindergarteners are eligible for EL services if they receive a composite score of 3.5 or lower and are not eligible for EL services if they receive a composite score of 4.0 or higher on the K Screener (Colorado Department of Education, 2022). Another state, Wisconsin, specifies that first-semester kindergarteners need an oral score of 5.0 (listening and speaking) to not be eligible for EL services; second-semester kindergartners and first-semester first graders need an oral score of 5.0 (listening and speaking), and at least one "Level 5" and one "Level 4" in the domains of reading and writing (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2022). For kindergarteners who arrive in the first semester, both states only test listening and speaking. However, if students arrive in the second semester of kindergarten or the first semester of first grade, both states will test them in all four domains of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. This variability in state identification criteria scores could have implications for who is counted as ELs across the United States and best practices for transferring ELs between states with different cut scores.

### ***Challenges in Screening Kindergarten Learners***

Alongside the challenges associated with EL identification in general, additional hurdles exist when screening kindergarteners. These hurdles can stem from the age and developmental needs of kindergarten learners, concerns regarding states that administer reading and writing

domains in first semester screening, and the administrative realities of providing these screeners within a narrow testing window. Due to the shorter attention spans of kindergarten learners, lengthy exams could reduce performance as longer assessments are more difficult for young learners to complete (Snow & Van Hemel, 2008). Moreover, test administrators need to understand the demographic of young kindergarten test takers and relate well to them. “Ensuring trust and mutual understanding is absolutely crucial” in test administrators who assess minority students (Snow & Van Hemel, 2008, p. 105). Trust and mutual understanding here may include establishing rapport with the student; helping them feel at ease before, during, and after the test; and taking the students’ needs into consideration, such as not scheduling the test too early or late during the school day.

Considering the young age of kindergarten learners and the age-appropriate expectations in literacy skills, SEAs and LEAs make the decision to use ELP assessments that only assess oral language skills (i.e., listening and speaking) or assess all four domains (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) while giving greater weight to oral language or literacy skills (Linquanti et al., 2016; Ragan & Lesaux, 2006). Assessing only oral skills could be limiting in that oral language proficiency may not be fully predictive of foundational literacy skills. Thus, ELP screeners that solely focus on oral language skills may not identify students who are having trouble developing foundational literacy skills. Not providing language support services to these students in a timely manner may negatively impact their later literacy development (Linquanti et al., 2016). Therefore, SEAs need to be aware of these potential outcomes when deciding whether these assessments should be implemented in their states.

In terms of timeline of test identification, kindergarten screeners need to be conducted within the first 30 days of the academic year, when children are getting used to the school, teachers, and routines, and may be shy (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008), or have differing levels of kindergarten readiness (Whyte & Coburn, 2022). As screeners are conducted individually with learners, smaller school districts may have a handful of kindergarteners to screen annually, but for larger districts, this could result in several hundred individual screenings. Screeners are often administered by staff or EL teachers, who may operate a push-in or pull-out model of providing services (Rennie, 1993). Finding a quiet space to administer the test may pose a challenge as well. Moreover, finding an adequate time to pull students for the screener that does not interfere with lunch, recess, or key lessons can also pose challenges. This study considers these challenges of identifying kindergarten ELs using a new ELP screener.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to gather information from K–12 administrators and educators to understand the actual decision-making criteria and procedures that were involved in EL identification in view of the new K Screener. For some states, the 2021–2022 academic year was the first time the K Screener was administered, with more states operationalizing the K

Screeners in the 2022–2023 school year. SEAs provide school districts and teachers guidance on how to use the test scores along with other criteria to determine ELs vs. non-ELs among new incoming students. With the introduction of the new K Screener, it is necessary to understand how the screener is being implemented across districts and schools for identification purposes. Additionally, the study investigated the extent of misidentification and how such cases were resolved. To address these goals, this study explored the following research questions:

1. Who makes decisions regarding kindergarten EL identification?
2. What are the criteria used for kindergarten EL identification?
  - a. What are the criteria required by the state?
  - b. What are the criteria used by the district?
  - c. If the K Screener score is used as criteria, which domain scores are administered/used? (listening/speaking or all four domains?)
  - d. If the K Screener score is used as criteria, what is the proficiency level (cut off score) used for determining ELs?
3. What are the procedures involved in kindergarten EL identification?
4. To what extent are the kindergarten EL identification decisions appropriate?
  - a. To what extent do ELs become appropriately identified vs. misidentified?
  - b. What are the positive and negative outcomes of misidentification?
  - c. How is misidentification resolved?

## Methods

A two-phase mixed-methods study was conducted between Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 in a U.S. state that is part of the WIDA Consortium. The research team recruited the state partly due to the large number of ELs in the state, and a pre-existing relationship between the state and WIDA. In Phase I, which was more quantitative in nature, a statewide EL identification survey was emailed to all districts in the state. In Phase II, which was more qualitative in nature, three case districts were selected within the state and their EL identification procedures were carefully examined via a survey and interviews.

### **Study Context**

This study focuses on exploring the EL identification procedures of kindergarteners in the aforementioned U.S. state, which is being kept anonymous. According to the state's Department of Education (2022), the term "English learner" is defined as "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" (p. 5). According to the state's Department of Education (2022), districts must take appropriate steps to identify students who need English language support. More information on general obligations to ELs can be found in a "*Dear Colleague letter*," which was jointly prepared by the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice (2015).

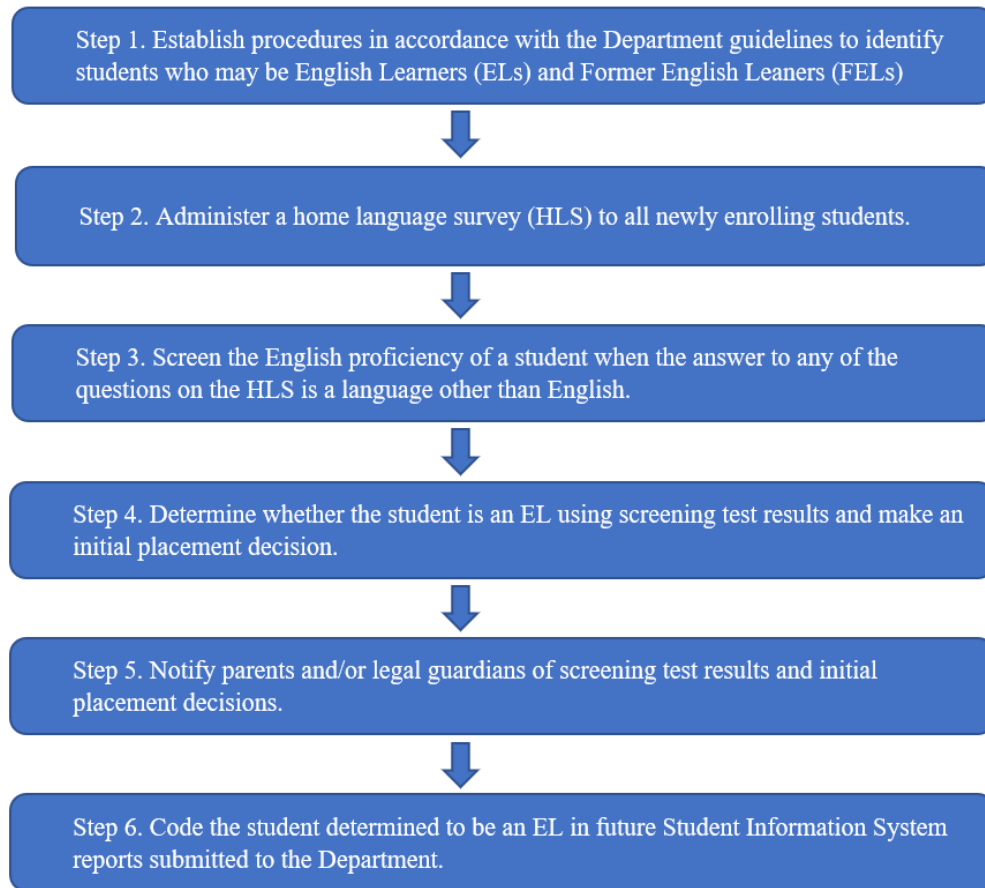
For EL identification, the state first establishes procedures and written policies for accurately identifying ELs in a timely manner (see Figure 1). By referring to the state guidelines, districts administer the home language survey (HLS) to all new students, keep records, and analyze the HLS results. If a student's HLS indicates that there is a language other than English spoken at home, the district needs to screen the student's English proficiency<sup>3</sup>. Kindergarten students who enroll at the beginning of the school year only take the speaking and listening domains of an ELP assessment (e.g., K W-APT, K MODEL, or K Screener). However, if they enroll in a district during the second half of the academic year, they need to take all four domains of the test: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. WIDA introduced the K Screener in 2021 and the WIDA Consortium states have started to administer the test to their students (see Table 1 regarding the criteria for determining EL status of kindergarten students). Districts make initial placement decisions based on the results of the screening and notify the student's parents or legal guardians of the results. Finally, districts code all students identified as an EL in the department's student information system.

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<sup>3</sup> Screening can take place throughout the year when a new student registers.

**Figure 1**

*State Guidelines for Identifying Newly Enrolled English Learners*



**Table 1***Initial Identification of ELs in Kindergarten*

<b>TEST</b>	<b>Kindergarten</b>	<b>Domains Assessed</b>	<b>Criteria for Non-ELs</b>
<b>W-APT Kindergarten</b> (available until 1/1/2023)	Fall semester	Listening; Speaking	Oral proficiency raw score 29 or higher
<b>WIDA MODEL for Kindergarten</b>	Fall semester	Listening; Speaking	At least level 5 in both Listening and Speaking
<b>WIDA Screener for Kindergarten</b>	Fall Semester	Listening; Speaking	Listening – at least Level 5; AND Speaking – at least Level 5
<b>W-APT Kindergarten</b> (available until 1/1/2023)	Spring semester	Listening; Speaking; Reading; Writing	Oral proficiency raw score of 29 or higher Reading raw score of 14 or higher Writing raw score of 17 or higher
<b>WIDA MODEL for Kindergarten</b>	Spring semester	Listening; Speaking; Reading; Writing	Listening – at least Level 5 AND Speaking – at least Level 5; AND Reading and Writing – at least Level 5 in one domain and at least Level 4 in the other
<b>WIDA Screener for Kindergarten</b>	Spring Semester	Listening; Speaking; Reading; Writing	Listening – at least Level 5; AND Speaking – at least Level 5; AND Reading and Writing – at least Level 5 in one domain and at least Level 4 in the other

## Phase I: Statewide (District-level) Survey on EL Identification

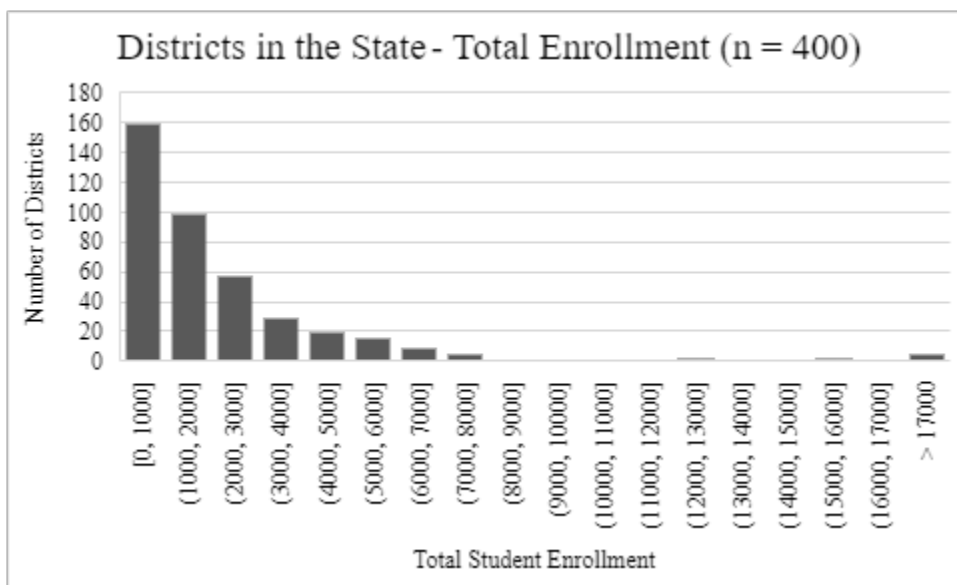
### ***Participants***

Phase I involved collecting survey data to explore EL identification practices across approximately 400 K–12 districts in the state (see Figure 2 for its student enrollment data). Participants were district-level EL coordinators, administrators, and educators who were involved in the identification of ELs in Fall 2022. A total of 159 participants from 142 districts responded to the survey (the response rate was approximately 35.5%). Of those participants, 133 participants (from a total of 118 distinct districts) responded that they were involved in the

EL identification process in their own district. Based on the distribution of total student enrollment of all districts (see Figure 2), the 118 districts that participated in the study were representative of the state's population (see Figure 3).

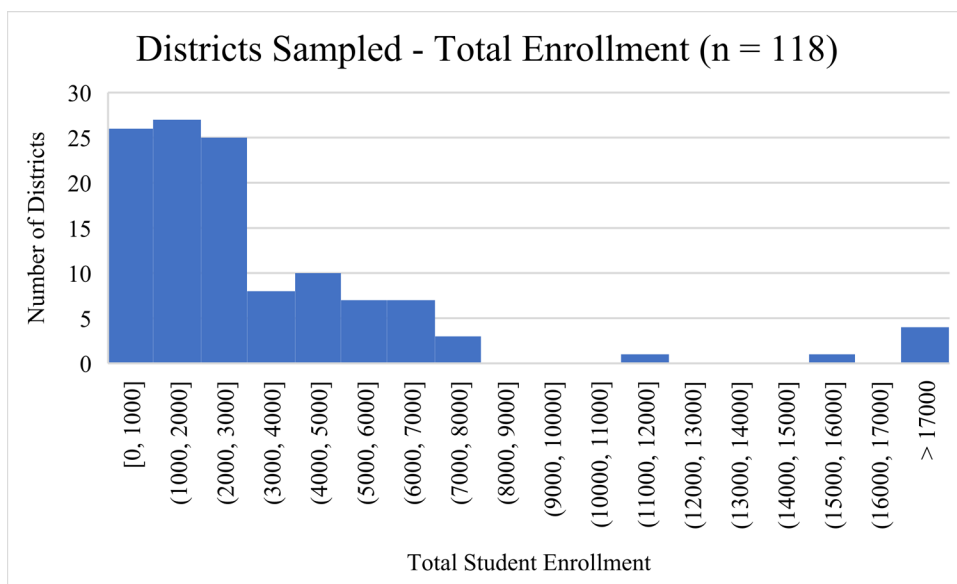
**Figure 2**

*All Districts in the State – Total Student Enrollment (n = 400)*



**Figure 3**

*Participating Districts–Total Student Enrollment (n = 118)*





In detail, 41% of the survey respondents were Assistant Directors or Coordinators of English Language/Multilingual Education or Title III, and 21.6% were EL/Bilingual program directors (see Table 2). Survey respondents were involved in the kindergarten EL identification process in different capacities: administering assessments (61.6%), distributing or analyzing the home language survey (45.1%), training educators (27.1%), providing guidelines (24.8%), communicating with parents/teachers (15.8%), and making placement decisions (10.5%) (see Table 3).

**Table 2**

*Role of Educators (n = 133)*

Role	Number	Percentage
Assistant Director/Coordinator of EL/ML/Title III	55	41.4%
EL/Bilingual program director	29	21.8%
EL/ESL/ELE/SEI Teacher	17	12.8%
EL Teacher/Coordinator	8	6.0%
Director/Associate Director of Student/Pupil (Support) Services	5	3.7%
Assistant Superintendent	5	3.7%
Test coordinator	4	3.0%
Support/resource teacher	4	3.0%
EL Lead Teacher/Department Head	2	1.5%
EL test coordinator/Assessor	2	1.5%
Director of Curriculum	1	0.7%

**Table 3**

*Involvement in EL Identification Process (n = 133)*

District	Number	Percentage
Administer assessment	82	61.6%
Distribute/analyze HLS	60	45.1%
Train educators	36	27.1%
Provide guidelines	33	24.8%
Communicate with parents/teachers	21	15.8%
Make placement decisions	14	10.5%

*Note: Please note that respondents may hold multiple roles, so the percentage does not add up to 100%.*

Most of the survey respondents (87.2%) had a master's degree (see Table 4) and 88.7% of the survey respondents reported having EL teacher licenses or certification (see Table 5). Over half of the survey respondents (55.6%) had over 10 years of experience supporting K-12 ELs in the United States (see Table 6).

**Table 4**

*Participants' Highest Level of Education (n = 133)*

Degree	Number	Percentage
Bachelor's degree	3	2.2%
Master's degree	116	87.2%
Doctoral degree	14	10.6%
Total	133	100.0%

**Table 5**

*Participants with EL Licenses or Certification (n = 133)*

Licenses or Certifications	Number	Percentage
Yes	118	88.7%
No	9	6.8%
Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) Endorsement	5	3.8%
Administrator Licenses	1	0.7%
Total	133	100.0%

**Table 6**

*Participants' Years of EL-related Experience (n = 133)*

Time frame	Number	Percentage
0-2 years	5	3.8%
3-5 years	15	11.3%
6-10 years	39	29.3%
Over 10 years	74	55.6%
Total	133	100.0%

### ***Instrument***

The *EL Identification Survey* was developed to collect data about EL identification decisions made at the kindergarten level. The survey consisted of 35 questions regarding (a) educators' background information, (b) EL decision makers, (c) EL identification guidelines, (d) EL identification criteria, and (e) the appropriateness of identification decisions (see Appendix A for the full survey).

### ***Procedures***

The *EL Identification Survey* was distributed across all district-level educators in the state in Fall 2022. The survey was distributed in early October, after EL identification decisions had been made in districts (note that the initial identification of a student as an EL, and parent notification, must occur within 30 days of the student's enrollment in a school [ESSA, 2015]). The survey was created in Qualtrics and distributed via an email invitation. The survey responses were mainly analyzed using descriptive statistics, focusing on similarities and differences in EL identification practices among districts. Due to the nature of the survey, in which respondents had the option to skip responding to certain items, the total respondent size for each item varied.

## **Phase II: Case Studies of Three Districts**

For Phase II, a case study approach was used to explore the EL identification practices of each of the three districts. A case study approach allows researchers to develop an in-depth and nuanced understanding of an issue or phenomenon within its natural context using the case as a specific illustration (Creswell, 2012). Case study research involves the investigation of a single unit (*bounded system*) or multiple bounded systems through using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). Three sources of evidence were used in this study: (a) student data on EL identification, (b) EL Identification Review Form completed by educators, and (c) follow-up educator interviews. The data was used for triangulating purposes, where researchers checked the consistency of the findings against differing sources to make the findings more robust.

### ***Participants***

Of the districts that participated in Phase I, three districts (one large, one medium, and one small in terms of EL enrollment) were recruited for Phase II (see Table 7). District A was a rural district with total K–12 enrollment between 1,000–1,999 students, and EL enrollment of around 30–99 ELs, including fewer than ten kindergarten ELs; therefore, it was categorized as a small district. District B was a medium-sized suburban district with a total enrollment size of approximately 3,000 students, with 500 or more classified as ELs. The district enrolled fewer than 100 kindergarten ELs. District C was a large, urban district with an enrollment of 3,000 or more students and 500 or more ELs, including 100 or more kindergarten ELs. All three districts indicated that they strictly followed the guidelines provided by the state, and schools had to adhere to them completely. In each district, kindergarten EL teachers were invited to fill

out an EL identification review form and participate in a follow-up interview. When needed, district-level educators participated in follow-up interviews to address the research teams' questions regarding their student data (see section below).

**Table 7**

*Participants of Phase II (n = 3)*

District	District Type	K-12 student enrollment	K-12 EL enrollment	Kindergarten EL enrollment	Number of educators participating in Phase II
District A	Rural	1,000 – 1,999	30–99 ELs	1–9 ELs	1 school-level educator
District B	Suburban	3,000 or more	500 or more ELs	10–99 ELs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 school-level educators</li> <li>• 1 district-level educator</li> </ul>
District C	Urban	3,000 or more	500 or more ELs	100 or more ELs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 school-level educators</li> <li>• 1 district-level educator</li> </ul>

### **Student Data**

Districts shared student data used for making EL identification decisions: HLS data (Home Language Survey responses), screener assessment scores (e.g., K Screener scores), and other data (if available) used for EL identification, such as parental input or data from other assessments used.

### **Instruments**

Kindergarten educators from each district were invited to complete the *EL Identification Review Form*, where they evaluated each new incoming kindergarten EL they supported by determining if the student's K Screener scores were an adequate indicator of the student's English language proficiency. The *EL Identification Review Form* was created using Microsoft Excel and consisted of two parts: Part A was for current ELs (to evaluate if any non-ELs were misidentified as ELs) and Part B was for potential ELs (to evaluate if any ELs were misidentified as non-ELs). This Excel spreadsheet was embedded as part of an online survey (Qualtrics survey) so that it could be distributed online.

Semi-structured interview questions were prepared for teachers who completed the *EL Identification Review Form*. The follow-up interview protocol consisted of questions spanning (a) the interviewee's background, (2) the identification process in their context, (3) data needed to identify ELs in their context, and (d) how the school district reconciles issues

regarding EL misclassification, meaning ELs being identified as a non-ELs or non-ELs being identified as ELs. Additional follow-up interviews were conducted with district-level educators when needed to better understand district data.

## **Procedures**

Phase II data collection began in early November 2022, which was approximately 1–2 months after EL identification decisions had been made. For teachers to accurately complete the review form and evaluate if ELs had been correctly identified, the researchers recognized the need for teachers to spend sufficient time with their students. However, it was undesirable to delay data collection until later, because students' language proficiency could improve over time, making it difficult for teachers to decide if a certain student was initially misidentified as an EL or is just showing drastic improvement in terms of language development. The month of November was therefore chosen as a reasonable timeframe for Phase II data collection to balance these two opposing issues.

The *EL Identification Review Form* (see Appendix B) was distributed via Qualtrics and was sent to the EL teachers electronically via email. EL educators were invited to participate in a follow-up interview to elaborate on issues regarding EL identification. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted approximately 20–30 minutes. Similarly, follow-up district interviews were conducted with district staff when there were questions regarding the district data. For example, some of the data that the research team received included missing information which needed to be clarified through discussion.

K Screener scores were analyzed in terms of their descriptive statistics. We conducted Wilcoxon signed-rank tests on District B's and District C's K Screener scores to determine differences across domain scores. We also conducted further analysis of students who were on the cusp, that is, "at the margin of EL-IFEP classification in kindergarten" (Umansky, 2016). This included students who received a score of 4.5 on the K Screener when their state required a 5.0 in order to not be identified as an EL.

For analyzing the EL Identification Review Form response data, researchers counted the proportion of misidentified ELs. Additionally, we analyzed educator recommendations for students who may have been misidentified as an EL; findings from this data revealed how misidentification cases were identified and resolved.

Lastly, the educator interviews were automatically transcribed via Zoom and manually corrected for any misinterpretations. Following this, the interviewee responses were qualitatively analyzed in MAXQDA, and coded to identify categories and subcategories of related themes. Special focus was placed on the problems and potential solutions surrounding the misidentification of ELs.

## Results

### Findings from Phase I: Statewide (District-level) Survey on EL Identification

Phase I survey results revealed EL identification practices across districts in the state, specifically at the kindergarten level. Approximately half (51.8%) of the participants were educators in a suburban district, 30% were in an urban district, and 17.2% were in a rural district (see Table 8). The survey respondents were from districts of varying sizes, with slightly over 40% from districts serving 2,000 or more K–12 students (see Table 9).

**Table 8**

*District type (n = 133)*

District	Number	Percentage
Suburban	69	51.8%
Urban	40	30.0%
Rural	23	17.2%
Total	133	100.0%

**Table 9**

*Total K–12 student enrollment per district (n = 133)*

Total Student Enrollment	Number	Percentage
1–499 students	38	28.6%
500–999 students	17	12.8%
1000–1999 students	18	13.5%
2000–2999 students	22	16.5%
3000 or more students	32	24.1%
I do not know	6	4.5%
Total	133	100.0%

In terms of EL enrollment, nearly half of the participants (45.5%) worked in a district with fewer than 100 K–12 ELs (see Table 10). When looking specifically at kindergarten ELs, approximately half (48.1%) worked in a district with 10–99 kindergarten ELs, 36.1% worked in a district with nine or fewer kindergarten ELs, and 12.0% worked in a district with 100 or more kindergarten ELs (see Table 11).

**Table 10***Total K–12 ELs enrollment per district (n = 133)*

Number of ELs	Number	Percentage
1–29 ELs	27	20.3%
30–99 ELs	33	24.8%
100–499 ELs	43	32.3%
500 or more	24	18.0%
I do not know	6	4.5%
Total	133	100.0%

**Table 11***Total Kindergarten ELs enrollment per district (n = 133)*

Number of ELs	Number	Percentage
1–9 ELs	48	36.1%
10–99 ELs	64	48.1%
100 or more ELs	16	12.0%
I do not know	5	3.8%
Total	133	100.0%

***EL Identification Decision-Makers***

Approximately 77.4% of the survey respondents indicated that ESL/EL/ELL/bilingual teachers were involved in the kindergarten EL identification process, followed by district EL/Title III director/coordinators (54.1%) and EL/bilingual program directors (31.6%) (see Table 12). The process of identifying kindergarten ELs often involved multiple educators. As shown in Figure 4, approximately 41.4% of the survey respondents indicated that there were two educators (in different roles) involved in EL identification, and 36.9% indicated having three or more educators involved.

**Table 12**

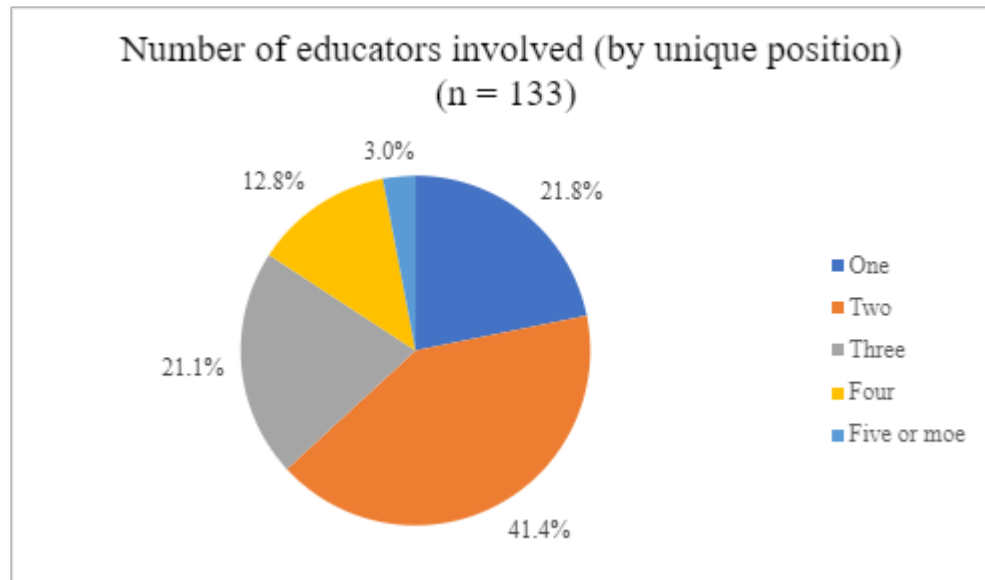
*School- and district-level participants involved in EL identification (n = 133)*

Participants	Number	Percentage
ESL/EL/Bilingual teacher	103	77.4%
District EL/Title III Director/Coordinator	72	54.1%
EL/Bilingual program director	42	31.6%
Classroom or content-area teachers who have ELs in their classes	35	26.3%
EL Test Coordinator/Assessor	29	21.8%
Principal/Assistant Principal	18	13.5%
Parent input	5	3.7%
Counselor/School psychologist	3	2.2%
Director/Associate Director of Student/Pupil (Support) Services	3	2.2%
Special Education Director	1	0.7%
Resource Room Teachers	1	0.7%
Assessment specialist	1	0.7%
WIDA Test results	1	0.7%

*Note: Please note that respondents could select multiple answers to this question, so the percentage does not add up to 100%.*

**Figure 4**

*Number of educators involved in the process by unique position (n = 133)*



In terms of final decision makers, over one-third (37.6%) of the survey respondents indicated that the district EL/Title III director/coordinator was the final decision maker in their



respective districts. In some districts, EL/ESL/bilingual teachers (32.3%) or the EL/bilingual program director (21.0%) was the one who made the final decision (see Table 13).

**Table 13**

*Final Decision Makers (n = 133)*

Decision maker	Number	Percentage
District EL/Tittle III director/coordinator	50	37.6%
EL/ESL/Bilingual teacher	43	32.3%
EL/Bilingual program director	28	21.0%
Principal/Assistant Principal	3	2.2%
Test coordinator/Language Assessor	3	2.2%
WIDA test results	2	1.5%
Multilingual Education Supervisor	1	0.7%
Director/Associate Director of Student/Pupil (Support) Services	1	0.7%
Department head	1	0.7%
Combination of EL Director & EL teachers	1	0.7%
Total	133	100.0%

### ***EL Identification Guidelines***

Approximately 83.5% of the survey respondents indicated that the state provides specific guidelines about EL identification and believed that their districts followed the guidelines strictly (see Table 14). Of the 83.5% whose districts strictly adhered to the specific guidelines provided by the state, 60.6% of them believed that schools also adhered to the specific guidelines provided by the districts. In the case of districts having local control (14.3%), nearly half of them (47.4%) indicated that their district provided specific guidelines to their schools, which needed to be adhered to completely (this finding is not presented in a table).

**Table 14***Adherence to State and District EL Reclassification Guidelines*State to Districts ( $n = 133$ )

Guidelines	Count	Percentage
State provides specific guidelines; districts adhere strictly to it	111	83.5%
State provides some guidelines; districts have local control	19	14.3%
No state-specific guidelines provided	1	0.7%
I do not know/I am not sure	2	1.5%

District to Schools ( $n = 131$ )

Guidelines	Count	Percentage
District provides specific guidelines; schools adhere strictly to it	76	58.0%
District provides some guidelines; schools have local control	16	12.2%
No district guidelines provided	29	22.1%
I do not know/I am not sure	10	7.6%

*Note: Please note that respondents could skip questions throughout the survey, so the  $n$  size varies.*

Table 15 shows how guidelines are communicated among the state, districts, and schools. Survey respondents reported that state-specific guidelines were provided to districts in various ways: a policy document (89.8%), online webinar (42.2%), and face-to-face meetings (12.5%). Some districts also received state-specific guidance through a guidance document on the state website, phone or email communication, meetings, training on assessment, or written guidelines. Similarly, districts provided their guidelines to schools through a policy document (80.2%), via face-to-face meetings (56.0%), and online webinars (12.1%). Some other ways district guidelines were communicated to schools included emails, communication between teachers, the EL department, and professional development meetings. While only 8% of survey respondents reported that the state communicated their guidelines using a single format, over half (53%) reported districts provided guidelines in only one way (see Figure 5). Districts also reported that communication between the state and itself occurred in at least two different formats (33% and 37% respectively).

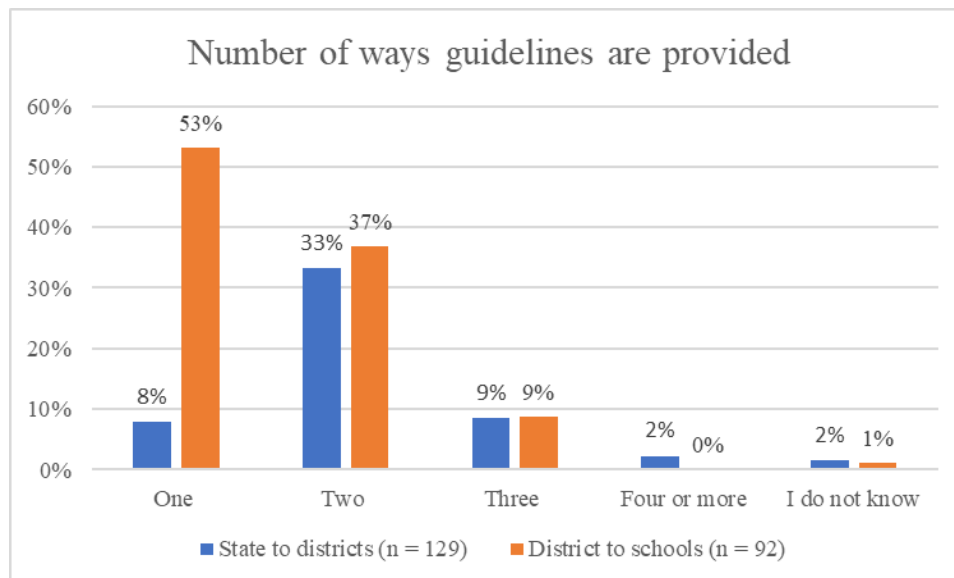
**Table 15***How State and District Guidelines Are Communicated*State to Districts (*n* = 128)

Types of Communication	Count	Percentage
Policy document	115	89.8%
Online webinar	54	42.2%
Face-to-face meeting	16	12.5%
Other	12	9.4%
I do not know/I am not sure	2	1.6%

District to Schools (*n* = 91)

Types of Communication	Count	Percentage
Policy document	73	80.2%
Face-to-face meeting	51	56.0%
Online webinar	11	12.1%
Other	6	6.6%
I do not know/I am not sure	1	1.1%

*Note: Please note that respondents could select multiple answers to this question, so the total percentage does not add up 100%.*

**Figure 5***Number of Ways State and District Guidelines Are Communicated*

### **EL Identification Criteria**

To better understand the EL identification process for kindergarten students, survey respondents reported the tools their districts used for kindergarten EL identification. Out of 130 who provided responses to this question, 99.2% used the home language survey, 96.2% of them used an EL proficiency screener, and 63.1% considered parent input (see Table 16). Other types of information used by districts included teacher input, classroom observations, family interviews/meetings, and previous identification or educational history.

**Table 16**

*Tools Used for K EL Identification (n = 130)*

Tools	Number	Percentage
Home language survey	129	99.2%
ELP screener	125	96.2%
Parent input	82	63.1%
Home language screener	8	6.2%
Other	14	10.7%

*Note: Please note that respondents could select multiple answers to this question, so the total percentage does not add up 100%.*

Regarding the number of tools/types of information used, nearly half of the survey respondents (49.2%) indicated their districts used three tools or types of information, and 34.6% reported two tools, and only 2.3% reported using a single tool for kindergarten EL identification (see Table 17).

**Table 17**

*Number of Tools Used for K EL Identification (n = 130)*

Number of Tools	Number	Percentage
1	3	2.3%
2	45	34.6%
3	64	49.2%
4 or more	18	13.9%
Total	130	100.0%

*Note: Please note that respondents could select multiple answers to this question, so the total percentage does not add up 100%.*

In terms of additional information, over one-third (38.1%) of respondents believed that no additional information or tools were needed (see Table 18). Other survey respondents identified several types of additional tools/information that they think should be used: parent

input (36.9%), additional information provided by the HLS (18.4%), home language screener (e.g., Spanish language test; 14.6%), and other assessment data (e.g., kindergarten screener, reading assessments, DIBELS/DIAL, Pre-IPT, K W-APT). Survey respondents also indicated several non-assessment data/information such as student interviews, classroom observations, prior schooling information, and special education considerations.

**Table 18**

*Additional tools/info should be used (n = 130)*

Additional Tools	Number	Percentage
No additional information/tools are needed	49	37.7%
Parent input	48	36.9%
Additional information provided by the HLS	24	18.4%
Home language screener	19	14.6%
Other assessment data	14	10.7%
Other	21	16.1%

*Note: Please note that respondents could select multiple answers to this question, so the total percentage does not add up 100%.*

Approximately 88.4% of respondents reported their district's home language survey is identical to the state's home language survey (see Table 19). Of the 11.6% of respondents who reported having a different home language survey, some indicated their home language survey is slightly different than the state version. Some districts also created an online version of the survey and clarified some of the language used in the state survey. Regarding the effectiveness of the district's home language survey, nearly one-third (28.7%) of the respondents believed it to be very effective, while over half (56.6%) believed it is moderately effective (see Table 20).

**Table 19**

*Similarity between state and district home language survey (n = 129)*

Identity to state (n = 130)	Number	Percentage
Yes	114	88.4%
No	15	11.6%
Total	129	100%

**Table 20***Effectiveness of district's home language survey (n = 129)*

Level of effectiveness	Number	Percentage
Not effective	3	2.3%
Slightly effective	16	12.4%
Moderately effective	73	56.6%
Very effective	37	28.7%
Total	129	100.0%

Survey respondents also listed some questions that they would like to be added to their district's home language survey. They would like to have more questions that give details about the language(s) spoken in the home and the student. Some survey respondents also shared their concerns or observations related to their district's home language survey. Table 21 provides a list of questions provided by the survey respondents.

**Table 21***Additional Questions to HLS (n = 83)*

Questions about language(s) spoken in the home

Topics/subtopics	%	Sample Questions
General clarity/follow-up questions	15.6%	<i>"The adverbs of frequency add accuracy to the home language survey, but they are confusing (especially 'seldom,') and written very small, making them look suggestive. Perhaps a clearer way of noting frequency and more common words like 'rarely' or 'infrequently.'"</i>
Frequency/Length	13.3%	<i>"Percentage of other language used by child at home/Percentage of English used by child at home."</i>
Communication agents	9.6%	<i>"It would be nice if there were a comment box where families could describe the language use in a bit more detail. Also, it would be nice if there was a spot to specify who is speaking the language with the student."</i>
Family factors	8.4%	<i>"Literacy level of family members."</i>
Types or sources of exposures	7.2%	<i>"Literacy exposure questions--Is your child listening, speaking, reading and writing in their home language?"</i>
Situational factors	4.8%	<i>"In what situation does student use language other than English?"</i>
Language used	3.6%	<i>"Please ask, 'which language does a bilingual parent predominately use when speaking to his/her/their child?'"</i>
Age	1.2%	<i>"What language was primarily spoken to your child from infancy to age 3?"</i>

#### Questions about the student

Topics/subtopics	%	Sample Questions
Language spoken by student	9.6%	<i>"What language is the primary language used by your child?"</i>
Heritage language or L1 literacy/proficiency	8.4%	<i>"Do children know words/phrases in a language other than English, or do they understand and/or produce full sentences?"</i>
English language literacy/proficiency	2.4%	<i>"Does your child speak and understand English?"</i>
Prior schooling and language(s) of instruction	6.0%	<i>"Did your child attend preschool--what was the language of instruction?"</i>
Student's academic ability	2.4%	<i>"Is your child at grade level academically?"</i>
SLIFE Experience	2.4%	<i>"Has your child's access to education been limited or interrupted for a period of time?"</i>
IEP	1.2%	<i>"Does your child have an IEP?"</i>
Parent interest in getting EL support for student	3.6%	<i>"Parents should be asked if they want their child tested for English language skills or that their child may be considered an ELL Student."</i>

#### Concerns or observations

Topics/subtopics	%	Sample Questions
No additional question needed, but concern with the current HLS or the process	20.5%	<i>"The state requires that we screen every student whose HLS mentions another language even just once. Sometimes we screen kids just because their grandparents speak another language, not even the child. <b>The guidelines are too thorough.</b>"</i>
Clarification/ Reassurance about HLS purpose or use	8.4%	<i>"In my opinion, the home language survey should <b>clarify the purpose</b> of the form and/or a staff member should assist parents in filling it out. <b>Often, parents will write a language down when they have taught their kids a handful of words in another language,</b> and it leads us to unnecessary over-testing."</i>
Views on bilingualism	1.2%	<i>"I think that one of the problems is that this process is only aimed at identifying ELs through a <b>deficit lens</b>. It does not take into account how many families are promoting simultaneous bilingualism and view language acquisition differently."</i>
Parents may lie to avoid EL identification	1.2%	<i>"I think the questions are accurate--I think parents lie on it to avoid their child being coded as an EL."</i>

*Note: Please note that respondents' responses can receive multiple codes, so the total percentage does not add up 100%.*

Various ELP screeners are available. As Table 22 shows, most survey respondents (90%) indicated that their districts used WIDA Screener for Kindergarten, 26.9% used WIDA MODEL for Kindergarten, and 25.4% reported using Kindergarten W-APT. It is important to note that although a large number of districts (71.5% of the survey respondents) only used one screener, some districts used multiple screeners (two [24.6%], or three screeners [3.8%]) for identification purposes (see Table 23).

**Table 22**

*Types of EL proficiency screener district used (n = 130)*

Types of screener	Number	Percentage
WIDA Screener for Kindergarten	117	90.0%
WIDA MODEL for Kindergarten	35	26.9%
Kindergarten W-APT	33	25.4%
Pre-IPT Oral	1	0.7%
Pre-LAS	1	0.7%

*Note: Please note that respondents could select multiple answers to this question, so the total percentage does not add up to 100%.*

**Table 23**

*Number of EL proficiency screeners used per district (n = 130)*

Number of screeners	Number	Percentage
1	93	71.5%
2	32	24.6%
3	5	3.8%
Total	130	100.0%

Given the purpose of this study, we further explored how districts used the K Screener. When using K Screener scores, less than half (41.7%) of the survey respondents reported using individual domain scores only, and one-third (33.9%) reported using both the individual domain and the composite domain scores (see Table 24). Of those who reported using the composite scores, over half (51.8%) of the survey respondents indicated their minimum Oral Language score was 5.0, and 46.4% indicated the minimum Overall Composite score was 5.0 (see Table 25). Of those who reported using the individual domain scores, the majority of the survey respondents indicated the minimum score for the Listening and Speaking domains was 5.0 (73.6%, 76.3% respectively; see Table 26). Approximately 97% of the survey respondents believed that their district has the same cut scores as the state (see Table 27).



**Table 24***WIDA Screener for Kindergarten Scores (n = 103)*

Types of scores	Number	Percentage
Overall composite score only	8	7.7%
Composite scores only	14	13.6%
Individual domain scores only	43	41.7%
Both individual domain and composite scores	35	33.9%
I do not know/I am not sure	3	2.9%
Total	103	100.0%

**Table 25***Minimum Composite Scores (n = 56)*

Proficiency level	Oral language	Literacy	Overall
4.0	12 (21.4%)	11 (19.6%)	14 (25.0%)
4.5	5 (8.9%)	3 (5.3%)	4 (7.1%)
5.0	29 (51.8%)	14 (25.0%)	26 (46.4%)
5.5	2 (3.6%)	1 (1.8%)	1 (1.8%)
6.0	1 (1.8%)	1 (1.8%)	1 (1.8%)

*Note: Please note that respondents could skip a question, so the total percentage does not add up 100%.*

**Table 26***Minimum Domain Scores (n = 76)*

Proficiency level	Reading	Writing	Listening	Speaking
4.0	4 (5.2%)	6 (7.9%)	13 (17.1%)	12 (15.8%)
5.0	7 (9.2%)	5 (6.6%)	56 (73.6%)	58 (76.3%)
6.0	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.3%)	1 (1.3%)
NA	41 (53.9%)	41 (53.9%)	3 (3.9%)	3 (3.9%)

*Note: Please note that respondents could skip a question, so the total percentage does not add up 100%.*

**Table 27***Similarity between state and district's cut scores (n = 101)*

The similarity between state and district's identification criteria	Number	Percentage
Yes	98	97.0%
The district has lower cut scores	1	1.0%
The district has higher cut scores	2	2.0%
Total	101	100.0%

Approximately 63.4% of the survey respondents believed that the cut scores were appropriate, while 35.6% believed that the cut scores should be lower (see Table 28). Of those who believed the cut scores should be lower, they expressed concerns related to the screener cut scores, factors that may affect student's scores on the screener, and other suggestions. Table 29 provides more details regarding their responses, along with sample responses.

**Table 28***The appropriateness of cut score (n = 101)*

Opinion	Number	Percentage
Yes, it is appropriate	64	63.4%
It should be lower	36	35.6%
It should be higher	1	1.0%
Total	101	100.0%

**Table 29**

*Educator perceptions regarding screener cut scores (n = 33)*

Issues/concerns with the screener

Topics/Subtopics	%	Sample Responses
Cut score is too high even for native speakers	33.33%	"We have <b>many English-speaking students that would not receive a 5.0 or higher.</b> "
The screener is unforgiving of mistakes	12.1%	"The state's/district's <b>requirement allows students to make very few mistakes.</b> I think more flexibility should be allowed."
More challenging compared to the previous screener	6.1%	"There are a small number of students getting identified with this cut off who <b>wouldn't have been identified with the previous test and scoring.</b> "
The task is too difficult for kindergarteners	6.1%	"Students are identified as ELs in K if they cannot adequately retell a story that they read at the beginning of the test. In my opinion, it goes <b>beyond what Ks should know.</b> "
The screener is too long	3.0%	"The WIDA Screener can be <b>long</b> for a kindergartener."

Factors to consider

Topics/Subtopics	%	Sample Responses
Student's personality or kindergarten characteristics	12.1%	"Kindergarten students often are <b>shy</b> during assessments or become <b>inattentive</b> , especially when it comes to retelling stories or answering very detailed questions. I believe many questions on the screener are <b>not always appropriate for K students entering school</b> for the first time. There are times when a student scores under a 5 but it is clear to the test administrator that it's <b>not an ESL issue.</b> "
Student's experience in school	9.1%	"For speaking, since some <b>first-semester Ks may lack experience speaking in the school environment.</b> "
Other factors such as poverty or special needs	9.1%	"Especially for entering K students. It would be <b>difficult even for English speaking K students.</b> It does not take into account other aspects like <b>special education, poverty, etc.</b> "
The screener is given in the first semester	6.1%	First semester <b>K should not require a 5.</b> They get significant language input in K anyway.
Multilingual doesn't mean needing EL service	3.0%	"...because many more families are now <b>multilingual</b> , however multilingualism does not equate to students needing ESL services."

## Suggestions

Topics/Subtopics	%	Sample Responses
Provide flexibility in domain scores	9.1%	<i>"The <b>state requires students to have a 5 in both domains</b>, but we have seen that students who score a 4 + 6 across the two domains, meaning that their overall score is a 5, are at similar levels as students who score a 5 in both."</i>
Lower the composite scores	6.1%	<i>"In some cases, a score of <b>4.5 in OL</b> demonstrates high enough language skills."</i>
Use professional judgment when student's score is borderline	3.0%	<i>"While we officially have a cut score of 5, I recommend that teachers use their <b>professional judgement</b> when students score a <b>4 or 4.5...</b>"</i>

## Other

Topics/Subtopics	%	Sample Responses
Need more time to evaluate the screener	6.1%	<i>"This is our first year using the K Screener, but there is concern that we may have <b>over-identified</b> students. We <b>will be analyzing the intake scores</b> to ACCESS results."</i>
Have not used the new screener yet	6.1%	<i><b>I don't have an opinion</b> on this at the moment. I will be using this K screener in the new year. I've reported my state's cut scores.</i>

*Note: Please note that respondents can select multiple responses, so the total percentage does not add up 100%.*

## Educator's Perceptions of the Appropriateness of Identification Decisions

To further understand the appropriateness of kindergarten EL identification decisions, we asked survey respondents for their perception of the frequency, sources, and consequences of misidentification, in terms of misidentifying ELs as non-ELs or vice versa.

The majority of survey respondents (78.7%) believed that ELs were rarely misidentified as non-ELs (see Table 30). When misidentification happens, survey respondents reported several actions to address the issue: readminister an ELP assessment (82.0%), collect teacher input or evaluation (79.5%), consult parents (77.1%), refer to the student's academic performance data (66.9%), and provide additional language support (33.8%) (see Table 31). Two survey respondents also indicated a more comprehensive approach, where educators review all relevant data and collaborate with parents and teachers to determine the next step. Other potential actions include observing the student in class or referring to the Multitiered Systems of Support (MTSS) team, which is a team consisting of various educators dedicated to supporting students' needs.

**Table 30***Perceived frequency of misidentifying ELs as non-ELs (n = 127)*

Frequency	Number	Percentage
Rarely	100	78.7%
Sometimes	22	17.3%
Often	5	3.9%
Very often	0	0%
I do not know/I am not sure	0	0%
Total	127	100.0%

**Table 31***Actions to address misidentification (ELs as non-ELs) (n = 127)*

Actions	Number	Percentage
Collect teacher input or evaluation	101	79.5%
Consult parents	98	77.1%
Refer to student's academic performance data	85	66.9%
Provide additional language support	43	33.8%
Readminister an ELP assessment	10	7.9%
Other	7	5.5%
No action is taken	1	0.7%

*Note: Please note that respondents could select multiple answers to this question, so the total percentage does not add up 100%.*

In terms of the sources of misidentifying a kindergarten EL as non-EL, the two most commonly-identified factors were inaccurate responses to home language survey (28.4%) and insufficient information collected by home language survey (21.6%) (see Table 32). The three most severe consequences of misidentifying a kindergarten EL as a non-EL were that students may struggle academically (48.3%), students may not receive the language support they need (46.7%), and the school or district may be judged as not upholding their Lau Plan (designed to meet the instructional needs of ELs) or having committed an Office of Civil Rights (OCR) violation (43.3%) (see Table 33). According to the OCR, schools are required to take affirmative steps to ensure that ELs can meaningfully participate in educational services and programs and that their parents can understand information communicated by the schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

**Table 32***Sources of EL misidentification (ELs as non-ELs) (n = 120)*

Consequence and frequency	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	N/A or Unsure
Inaccurate screening assessments	0.8%	4.2%	23.3%	60.0%	11.7%
Inaccurate responses to home language survey	9.2%	19.2%	51.7%	16.7%	4.2%
Insufficient information collected by home language survey	3.3%	18.3%	36.7%	32.5%	9.2%
Lack of resources to conduct parent interviews	3.3%	10.0%	23.3%	45.8%	17.5%
Lack of information on students' academic history	2.5%	11.7%	37.5%	33.3%	15.0%
Lack of qualified educators	0%	1.7%	10.8%	59.2%	27.5%
Differences in criteria between states/districts that ELs leave and into which they transfer	0%	4.2%	21.7%	46.7%	27.5%
Other	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

**Table 33***Consequences of misidentification (ELs as non-ELs) (n = 120)*

Consequence and severity	Very severe	Severe	Somewhat severe	Not at all severe	N/A or Unsure
Students may not receive the language support they need	15.0%	31.7%	40.0%	6.7%	14.2%
Students may struggle academically	15.0%	33.3%	39.2%	5.8%	7.5%
Students may have limited educational opportunities	14.2%	23.3%	34.2%	15.0%	14.2%
Students may feel excluded from classroom community	12.5%	25.0%	29.2%	24.2%	10.0%
The school or district may receive parent complaints	6.7%	16.7%	30.0%	31.7%	15.8%
The school or district may be judged as not upholding their Lau Plan or having committed an Office of Civil Rights (OCR) violation	20.8%	22.5%	18.3%	19.2%	20.0%
Other	2.5%	1.7%	2.5%	1.7%	55.0%

Nearly half (45.8%) of the survey respondents believed that non-ELs are “rarely” misidentified as ELs, and about 40.8% of respondents indicated that non-ELs are “sometimes” misidentified as ELs (see Table 34). When this type of misidentification happens, survey respondents reported several actions to address the issue: (a) consult parents (71.6%), (b) collect teacher input or evaluation (68.3%), (c) refer to student’s academic performance data (58.3%), and (d) readminister an ELP assessment (50.8%) (see Table 35). Some survey respondents (7%) also indicated that the state guidelines provide little flexibility in this scenario, so they must wait until the students “test out” the next time they administer a summative ELP assessment (ACCESS) at the end of first grade. A few respondents reported other potential actions, such as reviewing registration documents and evaluating to see if the student has any disability.

**Table 34**

*Perceived frequency of misidentifying non-ELs as ELs (n = 120)*

Frequency	Number	Percentage
Rarely	55	45.8%
Sometimes	49	40.8%
Often	9	7.5%
Very often	5	4.2%
I do not know/I am not sure	2	1.7%
Total	120	100.0%

**Table 35**

*Actions to address misidentification of non-ELs as ELs (n = 120)*

Actions	Number	Percentage
Consult parents	86	71.6%
Collect teacher input or evaluation	82	68.3%
Refer to student’s academic performance data	70	58.3%
Re-administer an ELP assessment	61	50.8%
Other	28	23.3%
No action is taken	6	0.5%
Provide additional language support	0	0%

*Note: Please note that respondents could select multiple answers to this question, so the total percentage does not add up 100%.*

When misidentification of non-ELs as ELs occurred, the two most commonly identified factors were inaccurate responses to home language survey (31.9%) and insufficient information collected by home language survey (26.9%) (see Table 36). Other potential sources of issues were student's personality, special needs issues, and high/strict state requirements on the assessment cut off scores. One of the consequences of this type of misidentification is the school or district being judged as having committed an Office of Civil Rights (OCR) violation (30.2%) (see Table 37).

**Table 36**

*Sources of EL misidentification of non-ELs as ELs (n = 119)*

Source and frequency	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	N/A or Unsure
Inaccurate screening assessments	5.9%	16.0%	34.5%	34.5%	9.2%
Inaccurate responses to home language survey	10.1%	21.8%	47.1%	16.0%	5.0%
Insufficient information collected by home language survey	8.4%	18.5%	37.8%	26.1%	10.1%
Lack of resources to conduct parent interviews	4.2%	10.1%	25.2%	45.4%	14.3%
Lack of information on students' academic history	2.5%	13.4%	36.1%	34.5%	13.4%
Lack of qualified educators	0.8%	0.0%	12.6%	56.3%	29.4%
Differences in criteria between states/districts that ELs leave and into which they transfer	2.5%	3.4%	20.2%	44.5%	28.6%
Other	6.7%	7.6%	6.7%	2.5%	49.6%

**Table 37**

*Consequences of misidentifying non-ELs as ELs (n = 119)*

Consequence and severity	Very severe	Severe	Somewhat severe	Not at all severe	N/A or Unsure
Students may fall behind classroom learning	13.40%	16.00%	25.20%	28.60%	16.80%
The school or district may receive parent complaints	7.60%	17.60%	37.80%	26.10%	10.90%
The school or district may be judged as having committed an Office of Civil Rights (OCR) violation	15.10%	15.10%	24.40%	21.00%	24.40%



In terms of potential improvements for the kindergarten EL identification process, approximately 23.5% of the survey respondents requested more enhanced ELP assessments, 21.8% wanted more detailed guidelines on EL identification, and 13.4% wanted more training from their state education agency (see Table 38). Regarding the ELP assessments, some respondents indicated their interest in having “assessments and accommodations that are appropriate for students with varying disabilities.” In terms of guidelines on EL identification, survey respondents wanted to have more specific guidelines on topics such as “misidentification and procedures to fix errors,” and “when/how to consider secondary screening or appropriate alternate assessments.” Educators also raised concerns about the “very high bar” set for K Screener, which many incoming kindergarten students cannot attain. Some respondents also wanted to include classroom observations in the identification process. One respondent also wanted more details about “collaborations between the Multilingual Learners and the Special Education departments.” In terms of training from the state education agency, respondents also would like to have more guidance on topics such as working with students who might have disabilities. Some respondents specifically highlighted the need to emphasize the importance of the HLS in professional development activities and provide more training to personnel and district administrators. Some respondents also indicated other types of improvements they would like to see, such as improving the HLS (7.5%), allowing districts to collect and consider additional evidence such as parent interviews (5.9%), providing more flexibility in EL identification guidelines (5.9%), and allowing districts to change identification decision or retest students (4.2%).

**Table 38**

*Improvements for EL identification process (n = 119)*

Improvements	Number	Percentage
Enhanced ELP assessments	34	28.6%
Detailed guidelines on EL identification	27	22.7%
More training from state education agency	17	14.2%
I do not know/None	35	29.4%
Other	43	36.1%

*Note: Please note that respondents could select multiple answers to this question, so the total percentage does not add up 100%.*

## Findings from Phase II: Case Studies of Three Districts

In this section, we will share case study findings from the three districts by describing the context of the district, background of educators who participated, the district’s EL

identification process, educators' perceptions of the appropriateness of identification decisions, and factors that may affect EL identification. We will then discuss the similarities, differences, and patterns noticed across the three cases.

### ***Findings from District A (Small District)***

According to the statistics provided by the state's Department of Education (2022), District A had 1,169 K–12 students and 83 K–12 ELs (7.1%), six of whom were kindergarteners at the beginning of the 2022–2023 school year. An educator in District A, Gabriela, participated in both phases of the study by completing the district-level EL Identification survey (Phase I), and the EL Identification Review Form and follow-up interview (Phase II). Gabriela was an EL teacher serving 17 students (11 pre-kindergarten and six kindergarten learners) in the 2022–2023 school year. Gabriela had a master's degree, ESL certification/license, and over ten years of experience supporting K–12 ELs in the United States.

#### ***EL Identification Process of Kindergarteners***

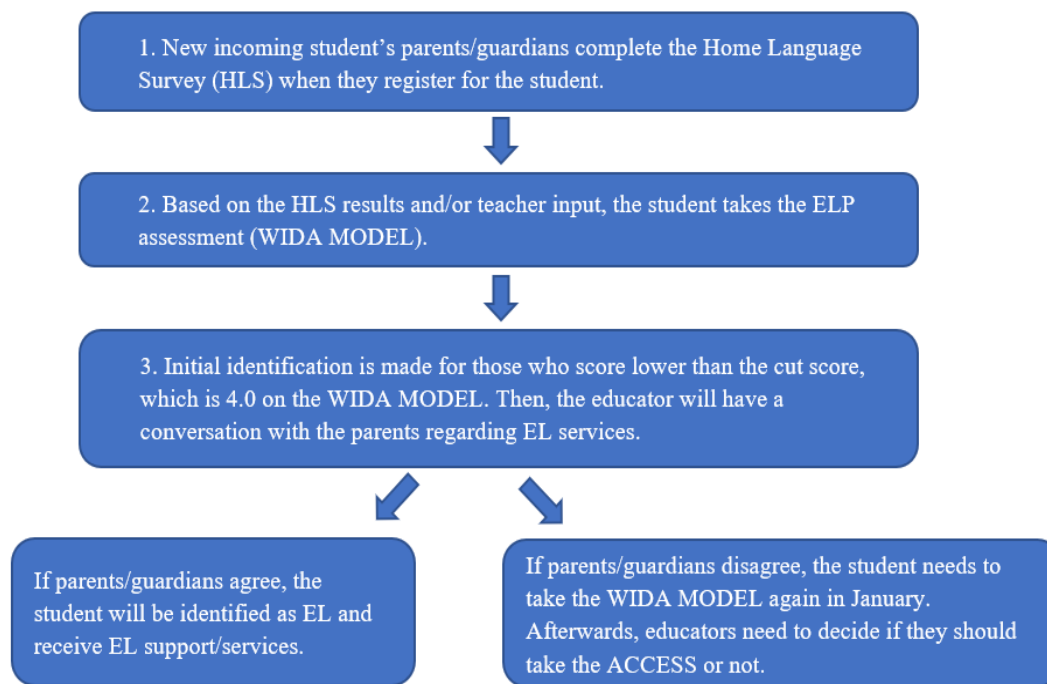
According to the survey responses from Phase I, District A screened their incoming kindergarten ELs beginning in June and continued through September 2022. The HLS, ELP screener (WIDA MODEL), parent input, and in-class observations were used for kindergarten EL identification. During the time of recruitment for Phase II, the district coordinators had communicated with the research team that they had started using the K Screener, but Phase II findings revealed that the school had yet to adopt the new assessment. In her interview, Gabriela shared that she needed some time to get familiar with the new assessment, which was not surprising as implementing a new assessment requires sufficient time and effort, including communicating and training relevant staff.

According to the survey (Phase I), both EL teachers and mainstream/content teachers who have ELs in their classes in District A were involved with kindergarten EL identification, but EL teachers were the ones who made final decisions regarding identification. Gabriela, in her interview, stated that she was the only EL teacher who made EL identification decisions for kindergarteners in District A. She also elaborated on the EL identification process in her district, discussing when and how she used different types of data to make EL identification decisions. First, parents or guardians of new incoming students would complete the HLS when they register their children. Considering the HLS responses, Gabriela would visit the ELs' classes to observe, play with, and talk to the students. Then, she would ask other teachers for their opinions on whether they believed the students were ELs or not. Gabriela would then administer the WIDA K MODEL based on the HLS results and/or teacher input. By referring to the WIDA K MODEL results, Gabriela would inform the parents/guardians of the identification decisions and have a conversation with them, if needed. She further explained that if parents disagreed with the identification decision, she would readminister the WIDA MODEL in January to decide if the student were correctly identified, and to administer the Kindergarten ACCESS

for ELLs to the students. Figure 6 summarizes the EL identification procedure based on the survey response and educator interview.

**Figure 6**

*Kindergarten EL identification process in District A in 2022–2023*



#### *Analysis of Student Data*

District A's home language survey was identical to the state's home language survey. According to Gabriela's interview, HLSs were completed on paper and were available in both Spanish and English. Some responses to the HLS were incomplete, as parents could skip the questions. The research team's review of HLS data of the six kindergarten ELs showed that the children were exposed to or spoke a language other than English at home. Regarding WIDA K MODEL scores, Gabriela mentioned that her district had a lower minimum entrance criteria (proficiency level of 4 out of 6 in Listening, Speaking, and Oral Language) than the state's entrance criteria (level 5 in both Listening and Speaking). Table 39 shows the descriptive statistics of District A's WIDA K MODEL scores for ELs, which shows that they tended to score slightly higher in the Listening domain than in the Speaking domain. (WIDA K MODEL reports a student's proficiency level, ranging from 1.0 to 6.0, with 6.0 being the highest PL level).

**Table 39***District A's WIDA K MODEL scores for ELs*ELs ( $n = 6$ )

Domain	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Listening	1.67	.82	1.00	3.00
Speaking	1.33	.52	1.00	2.00
Oral Language	1.33	.60	1.00	2.50

*Educators' Perception of the Appropriateness of EL Identification*

Gabriela listed seven kindergarten students in the EL Identification Review Form. She believed that all six of the kindergarteners who were identified as ELs were correctly identified as ELs, indicating 100% accuracy in EL identification; in addition, there was one non-EL kindergartener whom she believed needed EL services, and she was providing additional assistance to the student. In the interview, Gabriela provided a profile of each student, including the student's country of birth, time in the United States, language spoken at home, and parents' language. This background information was similar to the information provided in the student's HLS. However, Gabriela also provided additional insights that were not collected in the HLS, such as the student's personality, type of parent-child interaction, sibling's language ability, and the student's language abilities and difficulties. For example, in her description of one EL, Gabriela said, "I believe he is from Colombia too. And oh, my God, yeah, he cannot be more of an EL, always active, always going, always touching, always trying to speak. And then that *blank* because he cannot find a word." It is evident that Gabriela knew her students well.

As mentioned above, there was one non-EL kindergartener whom Gabriela thought could be an EL, given her home language survey response. However, this student's score on the WIDA K MODEL (4 on Listening, 5 on Speaking, and 4.5 for Oral Language) was higher than the district's entrance criteria, so she was not identified as an EL. To better understand this student's language ability, Gabriela conducted a home visit. In her interview, Gabriela explained her observation:

It's a very interesting home. Mom only speaks Spanish, so mom doesn't even read to them, but they have a high school girl who exited EL services who's the one actually working with the two (kids). I have one in kindergarten, and the other one is in pre-kindergarten. They totally understand everything in Spanish because mom speaks Spanish, but they speak no Spanish at all. It is only English. So, I did a home visit. I wanted to see what was going on at home, and that's what I found out. Is this (a) Spanish-speaking home? They do need

a little bit of time to kind of figure words out because they're going to try to speak to mom with simple words. So that's what I'm seeing here in school.

Although the student was "doing great" in the classroom, according to Gabriela's observations, she planned to continuously provide sheltered English instruction support to this student until the end of first grade. Based on ACCESS scores in first grade, the student's reclassification would be determined according to the state Department of Education's recommendations.

#### *Other Factors that May Affect EL Identification of Kindergarteners*

In addition to the criteria discussed above, we identified additional factors that may contribute to EL identification, including educator philosophy towards EL identification and the stigma of EL status as discussed below.

#### *Educator's EL Identification Philosophy*

Gabriela discussed her philosophy in identifying potential ELs, which is influenced by her past experiences working with elementary students. She preferred to overidentify kindergarteners so they can get the language support, then exit them later. She explained:

I have seen too many fourth graders that were not labeled as EL. And when you really look at why are they having these comprehension issues, it's back to language and/or the lack of first language, so they cannot transfer the knowledge. They're not getting it. Parents don't speak English, so parents cannot support them at home.

When she suspected potential kindergarten ELs through the HLS and/or teacher input, she screened them. She explained, "I always do [the screening], no matter what...I'm really careful and I would rather identify them, and then say, at the end of first grade, yeah, now, they're out. We have that flexibility here in the state."

#### *The Stigma of EL Status*

In the interview, Gabriela mentioned the stigma regarding EL classification. For example, parents may think "[ELs] are the ones that misbehave. They're the ones that do things wrong. They're the ones that are always in trouble." As a result, she would have a conversation with the parents after identifying the students as ELs to share teacher input and the WIDA K MODEL scores. She explained:

We have a culture here that being an EL is something bad. So, the parents are very reluctant. So that's why I like to get to know the student, get the teacher input, see if they're really EL or not, and then have the conversation with

parents. Due to concerns of being an EL, some parents prefer to 'opt out of [EL services].'

Gabriela shared the conversation she had with a parent during a home visit:

I have one of my early kindergarteners. Mom only speaks Spanish, Dad only speaks English, and I did a home visit. [Although I know both English and Spanish] I can only speak English because the dad doesn't want any Spanish in the conversation. So, I said, well, [the child] is entitled by law to receive my support. You can opt out. But why would you deny the opportunity for your child to be bilingual? You got to think a little bit that the most important things you can leave your kids is your language and your culture. So, if I can assist in that, why wouldn't you go for it? He didn't opt out, but I know he [the child's father] is very apprehensive of this EL.

In her interview, Gabriela said the parents were the final decision-makers, and if the parents disagreed with the identification decision, she would have to "readminister the WIDA K MODEL in January to then make a final decision." In these situations, educators could only provide informal support in the classroom and wait until January.

#### *Suggestions for Improving EL Identification*

According to Gabriela's responses, she would like to start the identification process before the students start school. She indicated that she wants "to spend more time with the kids before a final decision is made." This time would allow her to conduct home visits, do observations, and conduct parent interviews to have a better understanding of the students. In addition, she would like to give more time for the students to become familiar with the test administrator, so that the ELP assessment is not given by strangers.

#### ***Findings from District B (Medium-sized District)***

According to the state's Department of Education (2022), District B had a total of 6,440 K–12 students and 1,082 K–12 ELs (16.8%), with 131 of them being kindergarten ELs at the beginning of the 2022–2023 school year. The district's assistant superintendent, Jack, completed the district-level survey in Phase I. Jack had a doctoral degree and around 3–5 years of experience supporting K–12 ELs in the United States. For Phase II, the district EL director, Olivia, completed a follow-up interview. This follow-up interview was necessary to better understand the district EL identification procedure and to discuss missing information from the data (HLS and K Screener scores) that the district had shared with the research team. In addition, two EL/bilingual teachers (Emma and Bella) completed the EL Identification Review

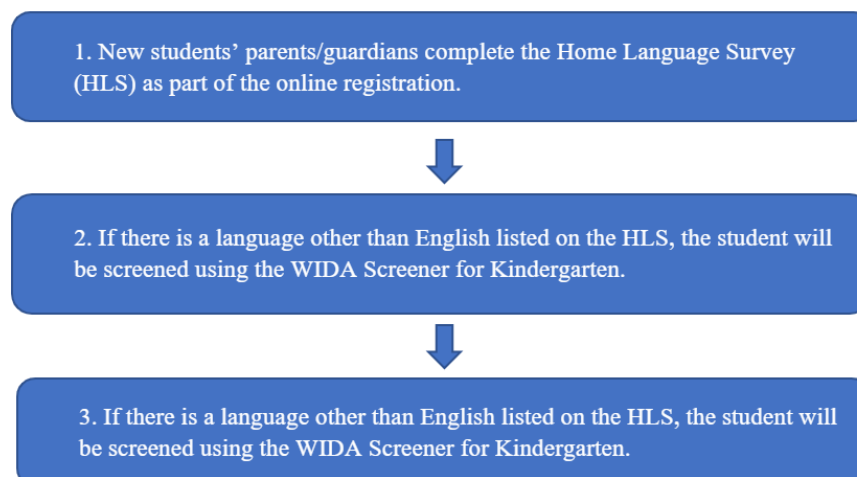
Form; however, they declined to have an optional follow-up interview to discuss the review form in detail. Both Emma and Bella had master's degrees, the state ESL certification/license, and over ten years of experience supporting K–12 ELs in the United States. Both of them were supporting kindergarten and elementary school ELs at a school in District B.

### *EL Identification Process of Kindergarteners*

According to the Phase I survey response, District B screened their incoming kindergarten ELs from May to September. Both the HLS and the K Screener were used to make kindergarten EL identification decisions. Parents of new incoming students completed the HLS and the K Screener was administered if there was a language other than English listed on the HLS. Identification of ELs was made based on the cut score set by the state. The District EL/Title III coordinator, ESL/bilingual teacher, and test coordinator were involved in the kindergarten EL identification process. The district's EL/Title III coordinator was the one who made the final identification decisions, meaning that placement decisions were made at the central office level. During the district interview (Phase II), Olivia provided additional details about their HLS. According to her interview, HLSs were completed by the student's parents/guardians online, either in English or Spanish. Then, the registration office staff reviewed the HLS with the parents when they visited the registration office in person. This review ensured that the parents/guardians completely filled out the HLS. Figure 7 summarizes the kindergartener EL identification process based on the survey response and educator interview.

### **Figure 7**

*Kindergarten EL identification process at District B (2022–2023)*



### *Analysis of Student Data*

District B's HLS was identical to the state's HLS. The research team's review of home language survey data of kindergarten ELs showed that all students were exposed to or spoke a language other than English at home. In terms of the screener cut scores, District B reported using the same cut score as the state, which was 5.0 for both listening, speaking and oral composite scores. Table 40 shows the descriptive statistics of the K Screener scores, consisting of data from both ELs and non-ELs. They show that kindergarteners tended to score higher in the Speaking domain than in the Listening domain across all three student subgroups (ELs, non-ELs, and non-ELs with special needs), and this observed difference was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 40**

*District B's K Screener scores*

All students ( $n = 138$ )

Domain	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Listening	2.30	1.65	1.00	6.00
Speaking	3.24	1.48	1.00	6.00
Oral Language	2.99	1.45	1.00	6.00

ELs ( $n = 113$ )

Domain	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Listening	1.92	1.33	1.00	6.00
Speaking	3.00	1.25	1.00	6.00
Oral Language	2.73	1.23	1.00	5.50

Non-ELs ( $n = 14$ )

Domain	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Listening	5.36	.49	5.00	6.00
Speaking	5.57	.51	5.00	6.00
Oral Language	5.36	.36	5.00	6.00

Non-EL students with disabilities ( $n = 11$ )

Domain	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Listening	2.73	1.55	1.00	5.00
Speaking	2.73	1.85	1.00	5.00
Oral Language	2.60	1.74	1.00	4.50

### *Educators' Perception of the Appropriateness of EL Identification*

There were a total of 33 current kindergarten ELs listed in the EL Identification Review Forms, completed by two educators. One educator, Bella, believed that of the 17 current ELs



she supported, 15 of them (88.2%) were correctly identified as ELs. The other educator, Emma, believed that 12 of her 16 current kindergarten ELs (75%) were correctly identified as ELs. Looking at both educators' EL Identification Review Forms, a total of six kindergarten ELs were possibly misidentified.

An analysis of the two educators' responses in the EL Identification Review Forms indicated several factors contributing to their evaluations of misidentified ELs: classroom performance (50%), Pre-K attendance (33.3%), personality (33.3%), and communication impediment (16.7%). For example, Emma wrote in her comment, "I believe this student did not do well on the WIDA Screener because she is generally shy and quiet; she also did not attend Pre-K. She is performing at the same ability and even higher than her English-speaking peers." Emma also believed another student that she supported "did not score well on the WIDA Screener because of a communication disability that was not disclosed to the tester." Another detail that educators mentioned was the frequency of the language used at home. Bella wrote in her review form that "parents reported the student does not know the Portuguese language. Only spoken in the home when grandparents are around. The student is very shy and soft-spoken. Perhaps a familiar test evaluator should give the ELP test." Both educators believed students' personalities, such as shyness, could affect students' performance on the K Screener.

#### *Other Factors that May Affect EL Identification of Kindergarteners: Student Disability and Continuing ELs from Pre-K*

Olivia mentioned that there were several students who were not screened due to their SPED designation. She explained the district procedures:

So, they're in a special program based on their IEP in preschool. We screen them before preschool using a different screener and then, when they're going to kindergarten, we have the choice to screen them again, but if their disability...like once they've been in school, they have their IEP, and we see that their disability wouldn't really allow them to have an accurate testing situation for the screener, we decided to not screen them again. So that's... so that's why some of them, they may have been ELs and then they weren't screened again.

According to Olivia, many students with disabilities were in a special Pre-K program based on their IEP and they were screened before preschool using a Pre-K EL screener. When they entered kindergarten, some of them were not screened with the K Screener and were coded as *non-EL monitors*, which meant they were not identified as EL but needed to be

monitored. Olivia explained that when students were diagnosed as non-verbal, it was hard to tease out what part was due to EL status and what part was due to special needs.

### *Suggestions for Improving EL Identification*

In the follow-up district interview with Olivia, she discussed her perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the K Screener. She mentioned that some testers felt the minimum criteria of 5.0 for both the Listening and Speaking domains was a “high bar,” suggesting that the cut scores needed to be lowered. There were several students whose scores were close to the cut score (e.g., 4.5), but they needed to classify them as ELs, according to the state policy. Given that students cannot be reclassified in kindergarten, they would have to wait and see how those students perform on the ACCESS test in first grade. Therefore, educators may need more time to better determine the effectiveness of the K Screener.

### ***Findings from District C (Large District)***

According to the state’s Department of Education (2022), District C had a total of 23,721 K–12 students and 3,985 K–12 ELs (16.8%), with 364 of them being kindergarteners at the beginning of the 2022–2023 school year. One educator, Lucy, completed the Phase I district-level EL Identification survey. She was the K–12 EL/bilingual program director and had a master’s degree, a state ESL license, and over ten years of experience supporting K–12 ELs in the United States. In Phase II, the district’s language-specific population and placement specialist, Abigail, completed a follow-up district interview to provide additional information regarding their EL data. Her role involved administering the K Screener, assigning students to EL programs, and overseeing intake at the district’s welcome center.

In addition, a total of three EL instructors from different schools in District C completed the EL Identification Review Form and participated in follow-up interviews. Chloe was an EL/bilingual teacher with a master’s degree and a state ESL license. She had approximately 6–10 years of experience working with K–12 ELs in the United States. Chloe supported 10 kindergarten and 20 elementary level EL students during the 2022–2023 school year. For the 10 kindergarteners, she provided pull-out support for eight students, and push-in support for two students. Lily also was an EL/bilingual teacher who had a master’s degree, a state ESL license, and over 10 years of experience supporting ELs. She provided push-in instruction to 10 kindergarten ELs and 21 grade 1–3 ELs; she also monitored three kindergarteners. The third educator, Sophia, was an EL teacher who supported eight kindergarteners and 37 grade 3–5 ELs. She had a master’s degree, a state ESL license, and 6–10 years of experience supporting ELs.

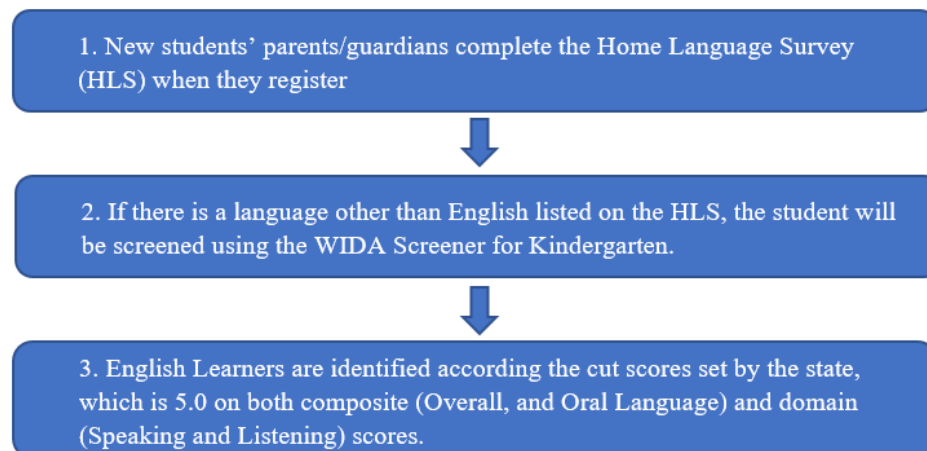
### *EL Identification Process of Kindergarteners*

According to the Phase I survey responses, District C reported screening their incoming kindergarten ELs primarily from April to September. The district used both the HLS and the K Screener to make kindergarten EL identification decisions. Educators who participated in Phase

II follow-up interviews elaborated on the kindergartener EL identification process in their district, which aligned with the survey responses. First, parents of new incoming students completed the HLS, and the K Screener was administered if there was a language other than English listed. According to Abigail's district interview (Phase II), HLSs were filled out online by the student's parents either at home or at the parent/family information center, in Spanish or English. With the online format, parents were required to answer all questions on the HLS. Identification of ELs were made based on the criteria set by the state. In terms of decision-makers, the EL/bilingual program director and language assessors (the person who administers the assessment) were involved in the kindergarten EL identification process, and the language assessors were the ones who made final decisions. Figure 8 describes the Kindergarten EL identification process based on the survey responses and educator interviews.

### Figure 8

*Kindergarten EL identification process at District C in (2022–2023)*



### *Analysis of Student Data*

District C's HLS was identical to that of the state. A review of HLS data of kindergarten ELs confirmed that all students were exposed to or spoke a language other than English at home. In terms of the K Screener, District C reported that their mainstreaming criteria was 5.0 on both composite (Oral Language) and domain (Speaking and Listening) scores, which was identical to the state's cut scores. Table 41 shows the descriptive statistics of the K Screener scores, which shows that students tended to score higher on the Speaking domain than the Listening domain ( $p = .06$ ).

**Table 41***District C's K Screener scores*All students ( $n = 121$ )

Domain	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Listening	2.65	1.89	.00	6.00
Speaking	2.83	1.53	.00	6.00
Oral Language	2.81	1.64	.00	6.00

ELs ( $n = 105$ )

Domain	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Listening	2.22	1.63	.00	6.00
Speaking	2.40	1.20	.00	4.00
Oral Language	2.42	1.39	.00	5.00

Non-ELs ( $n = 16$ )

Domain	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Listening	5.50	.52	5.00	6.00
Speaking	5.40	.50	5.00	6.00
Oral Language	5.34	.47	5.00	6.00

*Educators' Perceptions of the Appropriateness of EL Identification*

There were a total of 53 kindergarten students listed in the EL Identification Review Forms, completed by three educators. Sophia listed 26 current kindergarten ELs on her form and believed that 13 of them (50%) were correctly identified as ELs. The other two educators, Lily and Chloe, listed kindergarten ELs that they instruct, including those that they monitored. Monitored students were high-performing kindergarten ELs who received PLs 4 or 5 on the K Screener. For these students, educators supported them as a consultant by checking in with other teachers about the student's performance, rather than providing direct language support. On Chloe's review form, she stated that she believed 13 of the 14 current kindergarten ELs (92.8%) were correctly identified as ELs. Meanwhile, Lily believed that all of her current kindergarten ELs (13 total; 100%) were correctly identified as ELs.

Educators also discussed challenges in addressing EL misidentification. Because EL reclassification is not allowed in kindergarten, ELs need to wait until first grade to exit their EL status. There were additional concerns for ELs with disabilities as Sophia discussed below:

...I teach up to fifth grade and I've had children that I have been working with from first grade through to fifth grade who were misclassified at the very beginning. And they're never going to pass the ACCESS test, which is a way

of reclassifying because of their special educational needs. So, they're stuck because they're not going to be able to test out because they are, you know, it's not... the English language is not the problem.

Another educator, Chloe, mentioned that her district did not allow readministering screeners to ELs who were misidentified. She also worried that the students "won't do well on [the literacy] part of the ACCESS" because "a lot of kindergartners, regardless of language status, have low literacy." It was unclear whether "it's language or if it's because [they were] in kindergarten and still learning literacy." As a result, it was hard for EL kindergartners to score high on the ACCESS test in first grade and get reclassified.

Similarly, Lily mentioned in her interview that reclassification in kindergarten had not occurred during her six years working at District C. Although she thought it could be possible, "it would really take a lot of communication and documentation to be able to do that." Overall, all three educators agreed that when a kindergartener was misidentified as EL, it was challenging to reclassify or exit them.

#### *Other Factors that May Affect EL Identification of Kindergarteners*

Inaccurate screener data and potential student disability were discussed as other possible factors influencing EL identification.

#### *Inaccurate Assessment Results*

Of the 14 kindergarten ELs whom educators believed were misidentified as ELs, educators believed that seven (50%) performed worse than their true ability levels on the K Screener and were inappropriately placed in beginner EL programs. For example, Sophia indicated that six of her ELs performed well in the classroom but scored low on the assessment. She thought that the assessment results did not accurately reflect the students' language abilities:

So there are some students that the kindergarten teachers are saying who are very, very proficient. But they're still English learners, but they are no way a level one. So it's like this wasn't an option. The children who need to be readministered, because they're probably EL, but they're not level one EL. And they've been made a level one EL. But they're not, you know, they're probably more of a level three, low four.

Sophia expressed her concerns with this issue because, at her school, the types of support teachers provide to ELs varied depending on the proficiency level of their K Screener. She provided an example:

[This student] is very proficient, but she's down as a level 2, so she must go every day for 40 minutes of instruction. But she is way above all the other kids who are doing EL instruction for 40 minutes. So, she might be a level three. I have the level three group. So, I do different things with my level three group because they're more proficient at English. So, she needs different instructions. So, level two or level one group is basically like basic vocabulary, grammar, it's that kind of stuff. And level three is more like you have your basics and so it's more academic vocabulary. It's speaking longer sentences or explaining things or whatever, which she can do because she's one of the top kids in her class, apparently.

As a result, when students scored lower than their true level, they were placed in an EL program that required them to spend more time receiving language support than needed. Sophia believed that if "someone who knows [the student]" readministers the assessment in a more comfortable setting, the student could demonstrate their ability better. She further explained the difficulty of administering the screener:

Maybe they didn't say anything because they were shy, or it was their first day like they were in a different setting. I mean, and this is the difficulty of doing the screener--is like someone who doesn't know the kid does a screener, and they come in from outside and the kid is given an adult who just suddenly starts talking to them and may not answer or say anything. And it's evident to the person who works with those two children in particular that they really are way above, you know, they shouldn't be designated ELs. But the nature of doing the screener has made them into English language learners.

Chloe also mentioned similar concerns she had for the one student whom she believed was misidentified out of her 14 kindergarten ELs. This particular student scored a 3 on the screener, but she thought he could be a 5. She mentioned that this student was a foster student; English was his first language even though another language was spoken at home, which was why the student needed to take the screener.

#### Student Disability

The other seven EL kindergarteners whom Sophia believed were misidentified at her school were special needs students who were in classes that addressed developmental or

behavioral issues. Some of these kindergarteners had severe behavioral and developmental delays, or were non-verbal, but were not necessarily ELs. She explained her concerns regarding these specific ELs with special needs:

Some of these kids, especially the ones who are designated as special needs, will go through the system as EL students and they really aren't EL students. So, they're getting EL services but that's not what they need. And for a lot of the kids, who are EL and special education students, it is really hard to have the time to give them all the services they need.

When it came to students with special needs, Sophia stated that the primary challenge was "how to weed out the people who are not having a language issue. It may be a developmental delay, or it may even be a speech and language issue, which is different from an English language learner issue." She also questioned if those students who were non-verbal should have been designated as ELs. Once they were designated as ELs, they would need to take all four language domains in ACCESS to exit EL status. However, in reality, not all schools may provide relevant support for non-verbal students to successfully complete all domains, such as speaking. Non-verbal students could benefit from augmentative and alternative communication devices, such as a tablet or laptop that are designed to assist learners with a speech or language impairment to communicate.

Although Lily did not indicate any misidentified ELs in her EL Identification Review Form, she also had similar concerns with three of her students who had IEPs. She explained, "there are few that have IEPs that I'm not 100% sure about. Because I'm not sure how much is disability, and how much is language, as I'm sure that's a hard thing to tease out, especially for somebody that young." Lily believed two of three students who had IEPs were ELs, but she was unsure about the third student. This student seemed to have "good conversational language," but his Oral Language composite score on the K screener was a 3. She explained:

It's very possible that he could have had frustrations during the test, and he could have potentially refused to do something during the test, or you know, not done his best. With this sit-in, I can see things like that happening.

Both Sophia and Lily agreed that when students potentially have disabilities, it was challenging for educators to determine if they were ELs.

### *Suggestions for Improving EL Identification*

Educators had two broad suggestions for improving identification processes in terms of test administration procedures and multiple identification criteria.

### Test Administration Procedures

Both Sophia and Lily believed that the way the assessment was administered could potentially affect students' performance. Both educators mentioned that having a test administrator whom students were familiar with may help. For example, Lily explained:

It would be beneficial for students to be tested by somebody they are familiar with, like we try to do with ACCESS. I mean, these are students who don't know the person that is testing them. And I mean, I'm sure you know somebody's going to do a lot better with a familiar test administrator than they are with somebody they don't know.

To assess a large number of potential ELs within 30 days, larger districts may employ individuals to work specifically as test administrators. While this streamlines the screening process and can free up time for teachers to teach and contend with other beginning-of-the-year duties, the downside may be students' lack of familiarity with the test administrator, which may impact identification decisions.

### Multiple Identification Criteria

Lily also argued that "it needs to be more than just a test." She said, "It needs to be conversations with the parents and needs to be classroom observations. It needs to be more than just a one-shot test. Not everybody's good at taking tests." She believed that collecting multiple types of data would help the district identify ELs better in the future. Chloe discussed a concern that she had, not limited to kindergarteners, where some students who were siblings received different identification decisions—one was identified as an EL whereas the other was not. She would like to know ways or to have tools to figure out what could have happened and be prepared for future situations like this.

### *Perceived Effectiveness of the K Screener*

District C's educators also shared their thoughts about the effectiveness of the K Screener. In her follow-up interview, Abigail mentioned that she liked the K Screener because she thought it was "somewhat more accurate" than the WIDA MODEL. She further explained the difference between the two tests:

You have to go with the new K Screener a little longer. So even though you might be able to complete the whole listening, that does not mean that a student might get a higher score. But there are certain parts that you have to continue on with the K MODEL. [For the K MODEL] I did like the being able to stop if the students were not able to complete the first three questions, like the first part for listening and speaking. But I mean, each test is like, very



different. So, I feel like the one now [WIDA K Screener] is somewhat more accurate.

With the WIDA K MODEL, Abigail liked the fact that students did not have to complete all items; only students who were proficient progressed to the next level. In contrast, with the new K Screener, the test could take longer because students could not skip items although this would not enable students would score higher. She elaborated:

But to me, it seems more accurate because of the fact that you can see, based on their scores, that they are able to follow the commands or whatever it is that you're asking them. However, they're not able to produce orally. So, therefore, you know, it gives you a set score for both parts.

In addition, Abigail also praised the K Screener score calculator. She said:

We were able to [get a set of scores for both parts] anyways with the K MODEL, but since we have to put it in the calculator as well, it's kind of like a neater way to look at it, I guess, from my perspective, the way I see it.

With the WIDA K MODEL, each domain had two parts, and educators needed to enter both parts into the score calculator to generate a report. However, with the K Screener, both Listening and Speaking only had one part, so it might have been easier for her to interpret the scores from the K Screener.

### ***Similarities and Differences in EL Identification among Three Districts***

#### ***Variations among the Three Districts***

The state required districts to establish procedures, following those of the state's Department of Education, to identify potential kindergarten ELs. According to the state, districts were required to have new students' parent(s)/guardian(s) complete the HLS and administer an ELP screener to the students based on HLS results. All three districts reported that they adhered to the state's guidelines strictly. They used the same HLS version provided by the state, which was available in either Spanish or English. Variations in the kindergarten ELs' identification process included the data educators used to make decisions (ELP assessment only vs. multiple types of data), the way they collected HLS data (online vs. paper format), and the ELP assessment used by the district in the 2021–2022 school year (WIDA MODEL vs. K Screener).

In terms of the data used for EL identification, District A was the only district of the three that considered several types of data for EL identification. Instead of relying solely on the HLS results, District A's educator reported that she also considered teacher input and in-class observations to determine if a student should be screened. Both Districts B and C reported only

using the HLS results and the K Screener results to make EL identification decisions. It is worth noting that District A had a small number of K–12 ELs (7.1% of the student population) and only six kindergarten ELs. Both Districts B and C were larger districts with a higher proportion of ELs (16.8% of the student population in each district). As such, it may have been easier for the educator in District A to collect and consider multiple types of data for EL identification.

Another difference among the three districts was the way they collected HLS data from the students' parents/guardians. In District A, the HLS was paper-based, which had allowed the parents/guardians to skip questions on the survey, leading to missing data. In contrast, both Districts B and C used an online format with specific strategies to ensure that parents/guardians completed the HLS accurately. For example, in District B, a staff member of the registration center would assist parents/guardians in filling out the HLS or review the HLS with them. In District C, the online nature of the HLS required parents/guardians to answer all questions before moving to the next one. These strategies may help in preventing missing information on the HLS.

In terms of ELP assessments, District A used the WIDA MODEL to screen kindergarteners during the 2021–2022 school year, while Districts B and C had transitioned to K Screener. District A used criteria with cut scores which were lower than what the state required for the WIDA MODEL. Notably, their kindergarten ELs tended to score higher on the Listening domain than on the Speaking domain. In contrast, kindergarten ELs in Districts B and C scored higher on the Speaking domain than on the Listening domain on the K Screener. Further Wilcoxon signed-ranked test revealed that this difference (Speaking > Listening) was statistically significant in District B ( $p < 0.05$ ), but not in District C ( $p = 0.06$ ). Although it is difficult to generalize the findings from only two districts, other school districts and educators that use K Screener may notice similar trends in their incoming students' K Screener scores.

### *Common Concerns and Suggestions for EL Identification*

There were several common concerns amongst the districts regarding EL identification. Educators mentioned that students' performance on the ELP assessment could be affected by other factors, such as lack of familiarity with the test administrator, high cut score set by the state for EL identification, and student disabilities (e.g., a speech impediment that was not disclosed to the test administrator). As discussed above, educators from Districts B and C discussed the challenges of differentiating disabilities from language abilities through student performance on the K Screener.

In terms of suggestions for improving the EL identification process, educators from both Districts A and C believed that having a more familiar test administrator or conducting the assessment in a more familiar context would be helpful for students to perform well on the screener. Educators also wanted to collect more information regarding the students, including but not limited to, classroom observations and parent interviews. Using multiple types of data could allow them to better understand students' language abilities and backgrounds, instead of

relying solely on the results of the ELP assessments. Educators from Districts A and C suggested that spending more time with the students and collecting more data from different sources may help improve the effectiveness of the kindergarten EL identification. For District B, an educator mentioned that she needed more time to evaluate the effectiveness of the K Screener, since this year was their first year using the K Screener.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This working paper summarizes the findings from a two-phase study that explored the EL identification process of kindergarteners in a U.S. state, with a focus on understanding the decision-makers, criteria, procedures, and perceived appropriateness of the identification. The state provides its districts guidelines for using the HLS to determine if a student is potentially an EL, and subsequently screening students with an ELP screener. This study found variation in the EL identification process at the kindergarten level across districts in the state, considering factors such as overall district size, number of ELs enrolled in the district, and the number of ELs served by the EL teacher.

In relation to research question (RQ) 1 (i.e., EL identification decision makers), Phase I results indicate that although a variety of educators were involved in the kindergarten EL identification, decisions were often made by a single district-level administrator. Phase II results further highlight the differences between the kindergarten EL identification process at three districts with different enrollment sizes. In District A (small district), the EL teacher oversaw the majority of EL identification procedures and also was the main decision maker. However, at larger districts, the decisions were made more at the district level by administrators. Regarding RQ 2 (criteria for EL identification), Phase I results indicate that districts used a variety of data/tools to identify potential ELs, including but not limited to the HLS, ELP screener, parent/guardian input, teacher input, classroom observation, home visit, and prior educational history. District A, with fewer than ten kindergarten ELs, considered multiple sources of data when making identification decisions, while Districts B and C only used the HLS and K Screener. As suggested by Linquanti and Bailey (2014), including additional data in the identification process can allow educators to clarify any unclear questions from the HLS and provide a better understanding of students' language abilities.

In the context of RQ 3 (EL identification procedures), both Phase I and II results suggest that most districts had similar procedures in which they first distribute the HLS survey to the parents/guardians of all incoming new students, and then administer an ELP screener based on the HLS survey results. All three districts used the same HLS that was developed by the state. Most of the districts used the K Screener, with some still using other ELP screeners. These findings suggest that transitioning to a new assessment is not a simple task, which requires time, support, and collaboration among the state, districts, and schools. For districts that used

the K Screener, the majority of the districts' reported mainstreaming criteria were similar to that of the state: a minimum score of 5.0 on both the Listening and Speaking domains in the first semester of kindergarten. However, more than a quarter of educators in the Phase I survey reported that they had concerns with the K Screener and its cut scores. For example, educators thought that the screener was unforgiving of mistakes and the cut score was too high even for native English speakers.

Concerning RQ 4 (appropriateness of EL identification decisions), findings suggest that misidentifying non-ELs as ELs was more likely to occur than misidentifying ELs as non-ELs. That is, overidentification was perceived to have occurred across districts. This could be due to the inaccurate or insufficient information collected by the HLS and the high cut score set for ELP screeners. Educators expressed concerns with the current HLS questions (e.g., lack of clarity on some questions) and the EL guidelines (e.g., too thorough in the sense of requiring districts to screen students whose HLS mentioned another language just once). These findings echo the call from Bailey and Kelly (2013), highlighting the need for HLS validation plans to ensure that questions are carefully worded in order to collect valid information about students' language backgrounds.

In relation to RQ4, Phase II results indicate that educators believed student performance on the screener could be affected by other developmental and contextual factors, such as familiarity with the test administrators (Snow & Van Hemel, 2008). Test developers and test users may consider how these factors could possibly impact kindergarten performance on the screener and further collect empirical evidence to support the appropriateness of the screener for young learners (Lopez et al., 2016). In addition, Phase II results indicate the challenge of teasing apart ELs' disabilities from their English language development. For instance, educators expressed concerns about discerning students' disabilities from their low English proficiency using the K Screener. It is important to differentiate and document language differences versus language disorders to appropriately identify ELs and provide appropriate services (Sanatullova-Allison & Robison-Young, 2016). What could be helpful is for teachers to have additional conversations with the children's families to accurately identify if the children may indeed have disabilities, or are in the process of developing their English.

## **Study Limitations, Implications and Suggestions for the Future**

The study's findings, though valuable, are subject to limitations, as they relied on self-reported data from educators involved in the EL identification process from one state. This may introduce biases or inaccuracies as educators may have differing perceptions of the procedures. In addition, Phase II only involved three school districts, making it difficult to generalize the findings to other districts, or a larger population of ELs. As seen in this study, analyzing multiple types of data provided a snapshot of the EL identification process in the state; however, longitudinal data tracking student progress and experiences over an extended

period is essential for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and outcomes from EL identification procedures. Another limitation of this study was the lack of parental or guardian involvement in the research. Including parent/guardian perspectives may provide valuable insights into the EL identification process and its appropriateness, especially among young learners.

Despite its limitations, the study results have several important implications for educational policies and practices regarding kindergarten EL identification. Findings highlight the need for a comprehensive identification process that considers various factors beyond learners' English language proficiency on the screener, such as students' personalities (shyness) and special needs. Researchers and test developers could conduct additional research and explore how the tools (HLS, K Screener) could be better used in the field to accurately assess young children's language abilities and backgrounds, especially those with disabilities. In addition, educators suggested that it may be helpful to have additional time beyond 30 days to collect more information on incoming kindergarteners before identifying students using the K Screener.

This study also suggests the need to explore state and district policies regarding students who have already been identified as ELs using a Pre-K screener. Currently, there is no published state-level EL identification guidance specific to kindergarteners who have been identified as ELs in Pre-K. While some districts may automatically identify Pre-K ELs as ELs in kindergarten, others may not. Current research findings suggest that districts may have developed their own policies, which may vary across the state; however, this study did not collect relevant data to address this issue. Future research could further explore states or districts that screen Pre-Ks to better understand the rationale, process, tools used, and implications of their decisions on EL identification.

In addition, this research underscores the need for providing sufficient training and support to help districts transition to the K Screener smoothly. The findings raise questions about whether the current cut score required by the state is appropriate for identifying kindergarteners as ELs. In terms of K Screener scores, this study also found that kindergarten ELs tended to score higher on the Speaking domain, compared to the Listening domain. Future research could examine whether this trend (Speaking > Listening) persists in other district/state data, and factors contributing to such patterns. Educators also expressed concerns with having students take the test with an unfamiliar test administrator. Although in larger districts, it is necessary to have a designated staff administer the test, additional research efforts could explore the association between test administration procedures and student performance on the assessment.

In sum, the purpose of this study was to understand the decision-making criteria and procedures of kindergarten EL identification within one state, with specific attention on the K Screener. In addition, this study explored the existence, prevalence, and resolutions of

misidentification cases. Findings suggest there are variations in the EL identification process among districts and schools in the state. Findings also highlight the need for additional work toward HLS improvements and the overall EL identification process of young learners. With the recent implementation of the K Screener, this study is the first study to examine the use of the K Screener to identify kindergarten ELs. Future studies are needed to further support and enhance the validity of the K Screener.

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## Appendix A. District Survey

### English Learner Identification of Kindergarteners

Thank you for your participation! This survey is to be completed by **district-level English Learner (EL) program directors** who are involved in the identification of kindergarten ELs. The goal of this survey is to understand how kindergarten children are identified as ELs in your district. The findings will inform the resources that WIDA provides to policymakers, administrators, and other stakeholders regarding kindergarten EL identification. Therefore, your contribution is very important and highly appreciated. This survey will take approximately 10–15 minutes to complete.

Participants are eligible to win \$25 Amazon gift cards by completing the survey. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the WIDA help desk at [help@wida.us](mailto:help@wida.us).

#### I. Background Questions for Educators

1. \*District (Please indicate full district name):
2. Is your district considered urban, suburban, or rural?
  - a. Urban
  - b. Suburban
  - c. Rural
3. What is the total number of K–12 students in your district?
  - a. I do not know
  - b. 1 – 499 students
  - c. 500 – 999 students
  - d. 1,000 – 1,999 students
  - e. 2,000 – 2,999 students
  - f. 3,000 or more students
4. \*What is your primary current position? (Please select the title closest to yours)
  - a. EL/Title III coordinator
  - b. EL/Bilingual program director
  - c. Test coordinator
  - d. Support/resource teacher
  - e. Assistant superintendent
  - f. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
5. \*What grade level(s) do you support? (Select all that apply)
  - a. Kindergarten
  - b. Elementary school
  - c. Middle school
  - d. High school
6. How many years of experience do you have supporting K–12 ELs in the U.S.?
  - a. 0–2 years
  - b. 3–5 years
  - c. 6–10 years
  - d. Over 10 years

7. What is your highest level of education?
  - a. Associate's degree
  - b. Bachelor's degree
  - c. Master's degree
  - d. Doctoral degree
8. Do you have a state ESL license, certificate, or endorsement?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Other (please describe):
9. \*What is the approximate total number of K–12 ELs in your district?
  - a. I do not know
  - b. 1–29 ELs
  - c. 30–99 ELs
  - d. 100–499 ELs
  - e. 500 or more ELs
10. \*Approximately how many kindergarten ELs do you have in your district this school year?
  - a. I do not know
  - b. 1–9 ELs
  - c. 10–99 ELs
  - d. 100 or more ELs
11. When were incoming kindergarten ELs screened this year? (I do not know; January - September; select all that apply)
12. \*Were you involved in identifying kindergarten ELs this school year? (for example, provide guidelines for identification, train educators, distribute/analyze home language survey, administer assessments etc.)? [if “no” is selected, the survey will end]
  - a. Yes (Please specify your involvement: \_\_\_\_\_)
  - b. No

## II. Questions about EL Decision Makers

13. \*Who in your district is involved with kindergarten EL identification? (Select all that apply)
  - a. District EL/Title III coordinator
  - b. EL/Bilingual program director
  - c. Principal/Assistant principal
  - d. ESL/Bilingual teacher
  - e. Classroom or content-area teachers who have ELs in their classes
  - f. Counselor/School psychologist
  - g. Test coordinator
  - h. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
14. \*Who in your district makes final decisions regarding kindergartener EL identification?
  - a. District EL/Title III coordinator
  - b. EL/Bilingual program director
  - c. Principal/Assistant principal
  - d. ESL/Bilingual teacher
  - e. Classroom or content-area teachers who have ELs in their classes

- f. Counselor/School psychologist
- g. Test coordinator
- h. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

### III. Questions about EL Identification Guidelines

15. Does your **state** provide guidelines to **districts** about identifying kindergarten ELs?
  - a. I do not know/Not applicable.
  - b. The state provides specific guidelines and districts need to adhere to them completely.
  - c. The state provides specific guidelines, but districts have local control in the EL identification process.
  - d. No state-specific guidelines are provided.
16. (If “b” or “c” was selected in previous question) How does your **state** provide kindergarten EL identification guidelines to **districts**? (Select all that apply)
  - a. I do not know/Not applicable.
  - b. A policy document describing the state guidelines
  - c. An online webinar or presentation explaining the guidelines
  - d. A face-to-face meeting describing the guidelines
  - e. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
17. Beyond any state guidelines, does your **district** provide specific guidelines to **schools** about identifying kindergarten ELs?
  - a. I do not know/Not applicable.
  - b. The district provides specific guidelines and schools need to adhere to them completely.
  - c. The district provides specific guidelines, but schools have local control in the EL identification process.
  - d. No guidelines are provided by the district.
18. (If “b” or “c” was selected in previous question) How does your **district** provide kindergarten EL identification guidelines to **schools**? (Select all that apply)
  - a. I do not know/ I am not sure.
  - b. A document describing the district guidelines
  - c. An online webinar or presentation explaining the guidelines
  - d. A face-to-face meeting describing the guidelines
  - e. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

### IV. Questions about EL Identification Criteria

19. \*According to your policy, what information or tools are used for kindergarten EL identification? (Select all that apply)
  - a. Home language survey
  - b. English language proficiency screener
  - c. Home language screener (e.g., Spanish language test)
  - d. Parent input
  - e. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
20. \*In your opinion, what additional information/tools should be considered for kindergarten EL identification? (Select all that apply)
  - a. No additional information/tools are needed
  - b. Additional information provided by the **home language survey**

- c. Home language screener (e.g., Spanish language test)
  - d. Parent input
  - e. Other assessment data (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
21. \*(if home language survey was selected in #19) Is your district home language survey identical to your state home language survey?
- a. Yes
  - b. No (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
22. \*(if home language survey was selected in #19) In your opinion, how effective is your district's home language survey in identifying potential ELs?
- a. Not effective
  - b. Slightly effective
  - c. Moderately effective
  - d. Very effective
23. (if home language survey was selected in #19) In your opinion, what additional questions should be asked on the home language survey to more accurately identify potential ELs?
24. \*This school year, which English language proficiency screener does your district recommend using for identifying kindergarten ELs? (Select all that apply)
- a. WIDA Screener for Kindergarten
  - b. Kindergarten W-APT
  - c. WIDA MODEL for Kindergarten
  - d. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
25. (If option “a” was selected on previous item) Which scores from *WIDA Screener for Kindergarten* are used in your district when identifying ELs among first semester kindergarten students?
- a. I do not know/I am not sure.
  - b. Overall composite score only
  - c. Composite scores only (i.e., literacy, oral language, overall)
  - d. Individual domain scores only (i.e. listening, reading, speaking, writing)
  - e. Both individual domain and composite scores
26. (If option “b, c, or e” was selected on previous item) Which composite scores from *WIDA Screener for Kindergarten* are used when identifying ELs among first semester kindergarten students? Please select the minimum score your district requires for each composite score.
- a. Oral language: (drop down menu with 4.0, 4.5, 5.0, 5.5, 6.0, N/A)
  - b. Literacy: (drop down menu with 4.0, 4.5, 5.0, 5.5, 6.0, N/A)
  - c. Overall: (drop down menu with 4.0, 4.5, 5.0, 5.5, 6.0, N/A)
27. (If option “d or e” was selected on #23) Which domain score from *WIDA Screener for Kindergarten* is used when identifying ELs among first semester kindergarten students? Please select the minimum score your district requires for each language domain.
- a. Listening: (drop down menu with N/A, 4, 5, 6)
  - b. Speaking: (drop down menu with N/A, 4, 5, 6)
  - c. Reading: (drop down menu with N/A, 4, 5, 6)
  - d. Writing: (drop down menu with N/A, 4, 5, 6)

28. \*(If option “a” was selected on #24) Is your district’s cut score for *WIDA Screener for Kindergarten* identical to your state’s cut score?
- a. Yes
  - b. No, it is higher (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. No, it is lower (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
29. \*(If option “a” was selected on #24) In your opinion, is the cut score that your district requires for *WIDA Screener for Kindergarten* appropriate for identifying ELs?
- a. Yes, it’s appropriate.
  - b. No, it should be higher (Please explain): \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. No, it should be lower (Please explain): \_\_\_\_\_

## V. Questions about the Appropriateness of Identification Decisions

In this section, we would like to ask you questions about two separate situations that may occur during the EL identification process: 1) ELs who are misidentified as non-ELs, and 2) non-ELs who are misidentified as ELs. There are four questions on each situation. Please pay attention to the wording so as not to confuse these two groups of students.

30. \*In your experience, how often are kindergarteners who should have been identified as ELs misidentified as non-ELs?
- a. I do not know/I am not sure.
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
31. \*When a kindergartener who should have been identified as an EL is suspected to be misidentified as a non-EL, how do you address this issue? (Select all that apply)
- a. No action is taken
  - b. (Re)Administer an ELP screening assessment
  - c. Provide additional language support
  - d. Refer to student’s academic performance data
  - e. Collect teacher input or evaluation
  - f. Consult parents
  - g. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
32. In your experience, how often are the issues below sources of misidentifying a kindergarten EL as a non-EL? (Scale: N/A or Unsure; Rarely; Sometimes; Often, Very often)
- a. Inaccurate screening assessments
  - b. Inaccurate responses to home language survey
  - c. Insufficient information collected by home language survey
  - d. Lack of resources to conduct parent interviews
  - e. Lack of information on students’ academic history
  - f. Lack of qualified educators
  - g. Differences in criteria between states/districts that ELs leave and into which they transfer
  - h. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
33. In your experience, how severe are the following consequences of misidentifying a kindergarten EL as a non-EL? (Scale: N/A or Unsure; Not at all severe; Somewhat severe; Severe, Very severe)

- a. Students may not receive the language support they need
  - b. Students may struggle academically
  - c. Students may have limited educational opportunities
  - d. Students may feel excluded from classroom community
  - e. The school or district may receive parent complaints
  - f. The school or district may be judged as not upholding their Lau Plan or having committed an Office of Civil Rights (OCR) violation
  - g. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
34. \*In your experience, how often are kindergarten non-ELs misidentified as ELs?
- a. I do not know/I am not sure.
  - b. Rarely
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. Often
  - e. Very often
35. \*When a kindergarten non-EL is suspected to be misidentified as an EL, how do you address this issue? (Select all that apply)
- a. No action is taken
  - b. Re-administer an ELP screening assessment
  - c. Refer to student's academic performance data
  - d. Collect teacher input or evaluation
  - e. Consult parents
  - f. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
36. In your experience, how often are the issues below sources of misidentifying a kindergarten non-EL as an EL? (Scale: N/A or Unsure; Rarely; Sometimes; Often, Very often)
- a. Inaccurate screening assessments
  - b. Inaccurate responses to home language survey
  - c. Insufficient information collected by home language survey
  - d. Lack of resources to conduct parent interviews
  - e. Lack of information on students' academic history
  - f. Lack of qualified educators
  - g. Differences in criteria between states/districts that ELs leave and into which they transfer
  - h. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
37. In your experience, how severe are the following consequences of misidentifying kindergarten non-EL as an EL? (Scale: N/A or Unsure; Not at all severe; Somewhat severe; Severe, Very severe)
- a. Students may fall behind classroom learning
  - b. The school or district may receive parent complaints
  - c. The school or district may be judged as having committed an Office of Civil Rights (OCR) violation
  - d. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
38. \*In what ways could the kindergarten EL identification process be improved in your district? (Select all that apply)
- a. I do not know/None
  - b. More training from the state education agency (Please explain): \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Detailed guidelines on EL identification from the state (Please explain): \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Enhanced English language proficiency assessments (Please explain): \_\_\_\_\_



e. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B. English Learner Identification Review Form (for Kindergarten)

	Student's District ID	Do you think the student has been correctly classified as an EL? (YES/NO)	(Answer ONLY IF you answered NO to the previous column)							
			What scores would better reflect the student's actual English Language Proficiency? (between proficiency levels 1–6)		Overall Composite Score	If you could, would you suggest changing the student's status to non-EL? (YES/NO)	Please explain to WIDA what your recommendations would be for this student (e.g., re-administer an ELP assessment)			
			Language Domain Scores							
			Listening	Speaking						
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										

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