WIDA™ RESEARCH REPORT

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY STANDARDS ACROSS THE WIDA CONSORTIUM

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WIDA would like to thank all educators who graciously volunteered to participate in this research project. WIDA looks forward to continuing to learn from you!

World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) advances academic language development and academic achievement for linguistically diverse students. WIDA was formed as the result of a federal grant to comply with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. It is a consortium of states and districts working together to promote achievement of English language learners. The organization has created a comprehensive system that includes English Language Development Standards, Spanish Language Development Standards, English language proficiency assessments, professional development for educators of ELLs, and research on all aspects of English language learning.

RESEARCH

WIDA's Reseasrch Department seeks to provide timely, meaningful, and actionable research that promotes educational equity and academic achievement for linguistically and culturally diverse students. Its annual research agenda is developed under the guidance of the WIDA Consortium Board Research Subcommittee and includes topics in the areas of academic language, standards, professional learning, and policy.

Table of Contents and List of Tables

List of Tables

Executive Summary

This study examined the ways in which educators across the WIDA Consortium use WIDA's English language proficiency standards, and in particular the model performance indicators (MPIs). Thirty-nine educators from 14 districts across seven of WIDA's states participated in the study. These states include Georgia, Maine, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Data for the study was collected between January 2012 and March 2013, and the findings reflect the use of the 2007 edition of the standards.

The research revealed the following:

- District coordinators shape the use of the WIDA standards in powerful ways. Some district coordinators view ESL teachers as primarily responsible for ensuring that students have access to grade-level content. These coordinators position ESL teachers as readers of the ELP standards. By contrast, other district coordinators view ESL teachers as primarily responsible for fostering ELLs' academic language development. These coordinators believe that ESL teachers should be authors of the standards. It is only when language specialists are considered to be authors of the standards that district coordinators consistently provide them with meaningful opportunities to transform MPIs and use the transformations to guide instruction.
- Only language educators (and no general educators) used the MPIs included in the ELP standards. The main factors that influence language educators' use of the standards are their experience as ESL teachers and their knowledge of language development, as well as the opportunities available to them to unpack content standards and write their own performance indicators.
- No language educator reported using the MPIs unless she had had the opportunity to invest considerable time and effort into studying and understanding the ELP standards. The only ESL teachers who were able to take full advantage of the standards as a resource (by transforming model performance indicators and using the strands they create to guide their instruction) have had repeated opportunities to work with the standards over multiple years.
- ESL teachers use the WIDA standards because they provide (a) guidance on how teachers can support the academic language development of students with dissimilar language strengths and needs, (b) tools for formatively assessing academic language development and setting language development goals, (c) a sense of prestige and accountability, and (d) confirmation of key principles that teachers use to guide their language instruction.
- The use of language proficiency/development standards and other WIDA recourses (such ad the Can Do Descriptors) by educators in a given district is contingent mostly upon (a) the background knowledge and professional learning opportunities available to district coordinators; (b) the tools (such as English learner profiles or unit planning templates) and professional development opportunities that district coordinators promote for general education teachers, ESL staff, and school administrators; and (c) the formal opportunities for collaboration among language specialists and content area teachers.

Introduction

This research report examines the ways in which WIDA consortium educators use the WIDA English language proficiency standards. Many educators see the standards as a tool that can guide them in differentiating instruction and supporting language development among English Language Learners (ELLs). WIDA shares this view and invests a considerable amount of resources in designing, revising, and publishing the standards. In addition, all professional development that WIDA provides is in some ways linked to the standards. The study described here is WIDA's first attempt to systematically assemble and analyze evidence related to this assumption.

Research Questions

The research project explored the following related questions:

- Who uses the WIDA standards and why?
- What difference does the use of the standards make for the instruction of ELLs?
- If certain uses of the standards seem to have a beneficial impact on the quality of language instruction, how can those uses be supported?

According to the WIDA website, the standards (2007) "outline the progression of English language development and exemplify how to teach academic language within the context of content area instruction." The term *standards* thus refers to the strands of model performance indicators (MPIs) and the performance definitions, which outline the trajectory of language development on which the MPIs are based. In the course of the research on standards implementation, however, it became clear that for many educators the term *standards* encompasses the Can Do Descriptors as well as the speaking and writing rubrics. For educators who did not have extensive experience transforming model performance indicators, the standards tended to be synonymous with the Can Do Descriptors.

Participants

Thirty-nine educators from 14 districts across 7 of WIDA's states participated in the study. These states include Georgia, Maine, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Seven districts had an ELL population of under 10%, in 3 districts the ELL population was between 10 and 19%, and in four districts the ELL population ranged between 20 and 29% of the total student enrolment. Thirteen district coordinators, 23 English as a second language (ESL) teachers, 2 general education teachers, and 1 special education teacher graciously volunteered to participate in the study.

In order to recruit participants, state representatives from the six states listed above provided WIDA with the names of districts in which they believed the WIDA standards were being used. District coordinators then recommended teachers whom they believed were implementing the standards in their instruction. It is thus important to keep in mind that the educators who took part in the research are not a random sample. Rather, these are individuals who are considered to have a deeper understanding of the standards and use the standards to a greater degree than other educators in their position.

Data Collection

Data for the study was collected between January 2012 and March 2013. During this time educators were using the 2007 edition of the English language proficiency standards, though some were beginning to familiarize themselves with the 2012 edition of the standards as the study neared its conclusion. Therefore, all comments on the standards in this report refer to

the 2007 standards unless there is an explicit reference to the 2012 edition.

The data collected include interviews with the educators as well as relevant documents (such as unit plan templates, lesson plans, and report cards). The findings are thus mostly based on self-reporting, which in most cases was triangulated by lesson plans the educators shared with the researcher.

Findings

The findings reveal that the use of the standards varies within and across districts although there are clear general trends. The data indicates that the Can Do Descriptors are used by general education and ESL teachers alike, while the strands of MPIs are only used by some ESL teachers. The use of the standards as well as Can Dos depends primarily on the professional development and guidance that teachers receive. This professional development and guidance in turn depend on the district coordinator of ESL services, and in particular on the coordinator's vision of the role of the ESL teacher and the coordinator's understanding of language development.

In this report we explore the following topics, as identified by our findings.

- The relationship between the district coordinator's vision and the use of the standards;
- The ways that districts use the Can Do Descriptors;
- The ways that districts use the MPIs; and
- Recommendations about how the full use of the standards can be supported and what WIDA's vision for that use entails.

The Role of the District Coordinator

The study found that understanding the role of the district coordinator was essential to understanding how the standards were used.

In all districts except one, a district coordinator was in charge of ELL instruction and assessment. The one exception was a rural district with a very small ELL population and two ESL teachers. District coordinators had a wide range of titles and wore a variety of hats. Some had administrative as well as teaching duties, while others' responsibilities were exclusively administrative. Some were only responsible for the instruction and assessment of ELLs, while others served other groups of students as well. A unifying trend was that the district coordinators were responsible for planning (and often, but not always, delivering) the professional development of ESL teachers in their districts.

The data analysis indicates that the district coordinator's vision of the ways in which an ESL teacher can best support the academic achievement of ELL students is foundational to the guidance, resources, and tools that the coordinator makes available to all teachers in her district. Moreover, this vision is not an individual matter. Because the coordinators' vision is expressed in her communication with teachers and is reinforced by professional development and other tools that shape teachers' everyday practice, the vision tends to be shared by the ESL teachers in a district. This seems particularly true if the ESL teachers are new to the profession.

The district coordinator's vision of the role of the ESL teacher shapes the use of the standards in powerful ways. Two opposing visions could be distinguished based on the data, each of which shapes the guidance and tools offered by the district to all of its educators, and ESL teachers in particular. Some district coordinators view ESL teachers as primarily responsible for ensuring that students have access to grade-level content. These coordinators concentrate their efforts on

providing ESL teachers with materials and instructional strategies that they can share with general education teachers to help them differentiate instruction. ESL teachers provide general education teachers with supports (such as graphic organizers) or instructional strategies (such as pre-teaching vocabulary) that may help ELLs make sense of the content the class is learning as well as demonstrate their understanding. This view of the ESL teacher seems to promote a skills-based approach to language instruction, which emphasizes the acquisition of general academic vocabulary, grammatical structure, and discrete reading and composition strategies.

Other district coordinators view ESL teachers as primarily responsible for fostering ELLs' academic language development. Some district coordinators explicitly stated that they consider all teachers to be language teachers. District coordinators sometimes provide to all teachers tools intended to infuse the differentiation of instruction in every lesson (see Box 1). ESL classes in districts that privilege language development over language differentiation tend to emphasize the development of students' competences across all language domains and include a strong focus on setting language goals.

The Can Do Descriptors

The study found that many educators used the Can Do Descriptors.

General Education Teachers

The Can Do Descriptors are undoubtedly the most popular resource included in the WIDA standards. Educators from all districts participating in the study indicated that they share the Can Do Descriptors with general education teachers. There also was a consistent pattern in the types of documents in which the Can Dos are incorporated. Teachers may receive a Can Do Descriptors form for a single student or a whole class. In both cases, the form shows students' language proficiency by language domain. Students are placed on the Can Do document based on their most recent ACCESS score. In all districts but one, the work of placing ELL students on the Can Do Descriptors is done by the ESL teacher. In one district, however, general education teachers are intentionally expected to fill out the form so that they can become familiar with the students' ACCESS scores and begin a discussion with the language specialist. In either case, educators reported that this use of the Can Do Descriptors may accomplish the following:

- Give general education teachers a sense of the types of activities that students at different ELP levels can be expected to successfully perform;
- Highlight for general education teachers the variability in learners' language competence across the four domains; and
- Foster an appreciation of the language development process and an understanding that ELLs are not behind but they are where they need to be in terms of their language development.

In many of the documents collected for this study, we found that the Can Do Descriptors were included in lesson planning templates or English learner plans. These templates and plans also provided a list of classroom accommodations, or general teaching strategies that may support ELLs' access to content and participation in the classroom (such as longer wait time, use of visuals, and pre-teaching of vocabulary). In those cases in which a teacher receives a Can Do template for each of her students, the ESL teacher may check off accommodations appropriate for a particular learner according to their language strengths and needs. In one district the general strategies that teachers were encouraged to use were differentiated by English language proficiency (ELP) level, which shows an appreciation for students' language development but which also has the unfortunate unintended consequence of listing activities that require high order thinking only for advanced proficiency levels.

Setting language goals in Auburn, ME

The tools that district coordinators provide to (or require from) general education and ESL teachers shape in powerful ways the use of the ELP standards. These tools include lesson and unit planning templates as well as English learners plans. The tools and the professional development that often accompanies them have the potential to infuse the standards in the everyday practice of teachers in particular ways. One such tool, developed in Auburn, ME and called an ELL profile, consists of transformed performance indicators by content area (see Table 1). The tool emphasizes not only where the students are but also where they are going, thus fostering a focus on language goals. The transformed performance indicators in the tool are broad enough to guide language instruction focused on a range of topics and language competencies. The teachers in the district who participated in the study (one general education and one ESL) reported using the tool to set language objectives for their students and to plan instruction.

TABLE 1: Excerpt from the ELL Profile of a Student for Listening

Social and Instructional	Language Arts	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
Act 1.9 Goal 2	**Act 1.9 Goal 2**	**Act 1.9 Goal 2**	**Act 1.9 Goal 2**	**Act 1.9 Goal 2**
respond (non-verbally to explicit language pertaining to multiple-step classroom instructions (e.g., "What is the last word on page 45 of the dictionary?") follow conversations (e.g., telephone), process and respond to announcements over the intercom or by teachers	select or sort sources of information based on oral descriptions and visual support match information from TV, films, video, or DVDs to titles of segments	select problem-solving methods and tools from oral descriptions and visual support visualize, draw, or construct geometric figures described orally	differentiate types of physical, biological, chemical, or earth/space structures from pictures and oral statements (such as plant cells, kidneys and liver, compounds, or solar systems) replicate scientific experiments using real-life materials based on oral directions	match regions or countries with similar political, economic, or historical significance to U.S. or world history from oral descriptions and maps indicate availability of natural resources from oral statements by constructing graphs or maps

Note: A complete profile includes this kind of information for all four language domains.

The analysis of the ELL profile suggests that the following questions are important for districts to consider when designing and disseminating similar tools:

- What type of relationship between ESL and general education teachers does the tool foster?
- What process for setting language goals does the tool promote? What resources are educators expected to use as they set language goals?
- What professional development does the desired use of the tool require?

Despite the uniformity in the ways that the Can Do Descriptors are integrated in a template, these tools are used differently across districts. In some districts, the Can Do template is given to teachers at the beginning of the academic year as they receive their new students. After that, ESL teachers can only hope that general education teachers refer to it as they plan. In other districts, the Can Do documents are used in collaborative planning with both the ESL and the mainstream teacher. In these situations, the Can Dos are used to generate ideas of ways in which classroom activities can be differentiated for ELLs. This process allows general education teachers to become more familiar with the Can Dos and may encourage teachers to use the template to differentiate instruction when the ESL teacher is not present in the classroom to support the ELL students. Moreover, during collaborative planning sessions some ESL teachers discuss with general education teachers both Can Do Descriptors and performance indicators they (ESL teachers) have transformed. While ESL teachers do not expect the mainstream teachers to write their own transformations, the language teachers share the performance indicators as a way to raise awareness in general education teachers about what is involved in language instruction.

In some districts, district coordinators support language differentiation through the use of language objectives and encourage the use of the Can Dos for setting these objectives. This use is not surprising, since the Can Do document itself states that the descriptors can be used by educators to "develop… lessons with differentiated language objectives" and "set language goals with their English language learners." Nevertheless, WIDA documents related to the use of the Can Dos also explain, albeit indirectly, why the Can Do Descriptors cannot provide educators with a sense of how students' language develops. The Research Brief on the Can Do Descriptors states that unlike MPIs, Can Do Descriptors "function independently within a given level of language proficiency" and do not provide a complete trajectory of language skills across all levels of proficiency. It is mainly for this reason that WIDA trainers discourage educators from using the Can Do Descriptors for goal setting or progress monitoring.

Earlier in this report we pointed out that some educators use the Can Do Descriptors to emphasize access to content while others use them to focus on language development. In some districts, ESL teachers use the Can Do Descriptors to ensure that mainstream teachers do not have unreasonable expectations of ESL students. They may refer to the Can Do document and tell general education teachers, "If I have marked a level 4 for listening that means they can do levels 1, 2 and 3. But if you ask them to do this in level 5, they're not quite there yet." In other districts, ESL teachers shift the discourse from "this is where the students are" to "this is where they are going." ESL teachers discuss language development with mainstream teachers and use the Can Do document to show them skills that the students have mastered as well as language competencies that they may be acquiring. From the perspective of language acquisition, the second approach seems preferable. It fosters a dynamic rather than static view of language competence, and recognizes that students are constantly learning language. In addition, the latter approach may encourage mainstream teachers to challenge their ELL students linguistically and to discuss with the ESL teachers how that challenge can be made productive rather than frustrating.

ESL Teachers

ESL teachers use the Can Do Descriptors for a variety of purposes, including planning and differentiation as well as communication. Some ESL teachers find the MPIs rather general and look to the Can Do Descriptors for ideas of ways in which a language task (MPI) can be differentiated for students at dissimilar ELP levels. In particular, the ESL teachers use the Can Do Descriptors as a source of ideas for language functions for their differentiated performance indicator. They thus integrate both the Can Do Descriptors and the MPIs in planning.

As already mentioned, ESL educators in some districts use the Can Dos to set language goals for their students, a use discouraged in WIDA publications and by WIDA trainers. In some of these cases the educators are aware of the drawbacks of using the descriptors and would like to use the Performance Definitions and MPIs instead but feel that they do not have enough time to do so.

In some districts, the ESL teachers use the Can Do Descriptors to communicate with general education teachers as well as parents. In Winooski, VT, for instance, the ESL staff have created a report card that shows the Can Do Descriptors for a student's current ELP level (based on their ACCESS score) as well as the next ELP level. Every quarter, the teachers put a check next to the competencies a particular student has mastered. As these competencies increase each quarter, ESL teachers can show their mainstream colleagues as well as parents that students are developing language.

The Model Performance Indicators

How the Model Performance Indicators are Used

The data collected for the study indicates that the MPIs included in the ELP standards are used exclusively by language educators and not by general education teachers. Apart from the district context, the two other main factors that affect the use of the standards by language educators appear to be their experience as ESL teachers and their knowledge of language development, as well as the opportunities available to them to unpack content standards and write their own performance indicators.

Some of the ESL teachers with the longest teaching experience report that they do not use the MPIs because they do not need to. They are aware of the existence of the ELP standards but the MPIs remain "in the background" during their planning and instructional activities. These veteran teachers would sometimes use the standards booklet as reference, but they do not refer to it on a day-to-day basis. Experienced ESL teachers have the knowledge represented in the standards internalized already, so all they need is the occasional check.

No language educator reported using the MPIs unless she had had the opportunity to invest considerable time and effort into studying and understanding the ELP standards. The only ESL teachers who are able to take full advantage of the standards as a resource (by transforming model performance indicators and using the strands they create to guide their instruction) have had repeated opportunities to work with the standards over multiple years. These sustained opportunities for meaningful and rich engagement with the standards take different forms: training and planning days during the summer, repeated professional development sessions during the school year, coaching training (for teachers who work as a resource for other ESL staff in their district), study groups dedicated to designing transformed strands, and others. The data analysis reveals that in addition to being repeated and sustained, the professional development opportunities that best support the full use of the standards as a resource have two characteristics:

- The professional development is facilitated (at least initially) by a language educator with deep knowledge of the design, purpose, and flexibility of the WIDA standards. In many cases this educator is the district coordinator, though it may also be a WIDA certified consultant or university faculty; and
- The professional development is collaborative in nature and allows ESL teachers to engage in the actual work of transforming model performance indicators.

When professional development opportunities related to the ELP standards are more limited in nature, educators do not take full advantage of the MPIs. They turn to the Can Do Descriptors for guidance instead. Some ESL educators use the strands of MPIs that WIDA provides only when the example topic coincides with the topic they are teaching. In these cases, they adopt a strand wholesale. When the topic does not match the content an ESL teacher is targeting, they don't use the MPIs. Although the adoption of a whole WIDA strand may help ESL teachers differentiate instruction, such instruction has at least one major shortcoming: it is not rooted in the needs of the ELL students in a particular classroom. stopped here.

Transforming the WIDA Standards in Fargo, ND

In Fargo, ND, language educators at the secondary level are using the WIDA model performance indicators to plan whole courses. Teachers are certified in both content and ESL and teach sheltered content classes for which the ELL students receive content credit. The teachers focus on ensuring that the students acquire the content expected of them at the same time as they develop their academic language. Content and language learning in these classes are on a par with and support each other.

The teachers' work with the standards began several years ago. For some of them it began with the realization that they could not be effective content teachers if they were not language teachers as well. Initially, the educators received training on the WIDA standards, and were guided in their work on transforming the model performance indicators by their district coordinator. Currently, however, the teachers have enough experience to work on their own and all they need is time.

For several years, the district coordinator has set aside financial resources that she can use to provide planning time for the teachers in the summer. The teachers take several days to go over the course they are going to teach and write performance indicators for each of their units, which they print in small booklets. They write performance indicators for each level and for each domain (see Table 2 below). They also note down specific instructional activities in which they would like to engage their students. During the school year, they use the transformed performance indicators to guide their instruction. As they teach, they find themselves further transforming the indicators and making important decisions about grouping. The work done each summer is more of a foundation for the actual teaching that takes place in their classrooms. It ensures, however, that language development is supported purposefully and systematically. It also allows educators to improve on their work as they return to the performance indicators they have written the year before.

TABLE 2: Excerpt from ELL Physical Science, ELL and Content Standards Alignment, Curriculum Writing (Summer 2012)

CHAPTER 3 – STATES OF MATTER	
Power Learning Target:	
1.	Classify elements according to similar properties (e.g., metal, nonmetal, solids, liquids, gases)
Listening Standard: States of Matter	
Level 1:	Locate components of states of matter from diagrams and oral statements
Level 2:	Identify states of matter from diagrams and oral statements
Level 3:	Distinguish between properties of states of matter from diagrams and oral descriptions
Level 4:	Compare/Contrast states of matter from diagrams and oral descriptions Compare/Contrast phase changes in states of matter from diagrams and oral descriptions
Level 5:	Analyze phase changes in states of matter from oral descriptions of grade-level material

Note: Transformed performance indicators for the other three language domains follow.

Why Teachers Use the Model Performance Indicators

ESL teachers across the consortium use the MPIs for a variety of reasons. The list below represents a collection of all the views expressed in the course of the research study and not the reasons any one individual teacher gave. Each teacher tended to give one to two reasons.

Guidance. Most ESL teachers interviewed for the present project reported using the WIDA standards as a guide about: (a) what they can reasonably expect from students at different ELP levels; (b) what goals they can reasonably set for students' language development; and (c) what academic language entails.

Language educators shared that the MPI strands give them a sense of the types of instructional activities in which they can expect ELL students to engage independently and with support. The standards guide educators in planning instruction that targets the same concept or skill but takes into consideration students' varying language strengths and needs. As one teacher explained, "I use the WIDA standards [to see] what kind of language the kids need in order to do the research, in order to take notes, in order to explain or use sequencing." The standards offer guidance to teachers because they help them tease out as well as differentiate the language demands of the instructional tasks in which students are engaged. It seems that the language functions in the MPIs are most useful in this regard, though some educators describe looking at the lists of supports provided in the Resource Guide to ensure that they do not get stuck using the same supports when they differentiate instruction of their students.

Some teachers reported referring to the standards especially in situations in which a student is having difficulty in the classroom. As one teacher said, "if a child seems to be really struggling quite often I will go back to [the MPIs] and see, 'oh, yes, well, this is why they did not understand how to do that.'"

Language educators reported referring to the MPI strands to get a better sense of the language goals that may be appropriate for different students. One ESL teacher shared the following, "As a practitioner, I feel like [the standards] set a benchmark for [my language] target: learning target as well as assessment target." When educators use the MPIs in conjunction with the WIDA rubrics or performance definitions, they find guidance on instructional activities they can design in order to facilitate their students' language growth. One ESL teacher explained, "If we are doing compare and contrast, we start with basic facts. And then… the next step would be, okay, you have listed the facts. Now can you give examples of them or explain them?" In sum, educators find support in the standards both for where the students need to be and how to support the students in getting there.

The standards also guide language educators in defining and describing academic language. Many district coordinators, as well as ESL staff, stated that the standards have greatly affected the practice of language educators by isolating the area of their expertise and giving it a name. As one ESL teacher described it, "Teaching language is not very clear cut… There is so much to teach. And the standards really help you focus on what language students need, what is appropriate at their level, how they can acquire and what they can be expected to show." The standards provide a focus for ESL instruction at the same time as they point out a way in which language and content instruction can be integrated. Some educators familiar with the 2012 edition of the standards shared that the new edition was particularly helpful in providing clear examples of academic language.

By defining academic language as the language of the disciplines as well as social instructional language, the WIDA standards have expanded the relevance of language instruction beyond any one discipline. This expansion has spurred tangible changes in at least one ESL department. One of the ESL teachers who participated in the study shared: "There are five of us ESL teachers. Three of us were language ESL teachers and the others were math ESL teachers. And more

and more we started thinking this is contrary to what we have to do according to the WIDA standards… Now we have all those content areas covered." The ELP standards had a tangible effect on the planning of this ESL team, because they prompted educators to focus on all five WIDA standards rather than only on the language of language arts and the language of math.

The ELP standards not only support a view of academic language as the language of any discipline, but also allow for instruction that focuses on the social language of the classroom. The first standard (social and instructional language) expands the range of topics available to ESL teachers and justifies those educators who feel that they need to focus on social and instructional language to support their students' academic success. This point will be discussed further in the section on Confirmation.

Integration of all language domains. Many language educators find the organization of the standards' framework useful in highlighting important pieces of both language instruction and language development. For instance, the strands remind educators that the most effective language instruction facilitates the development of all four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). An ESL educator described one of the main organizing principles behind her instruction thus, "[Some] people have the notion of, okay, it is writing time so all we are going to do is write. But I am responsible for all four domains and that is how language acquisition needs to be." This remark suggests that the standards framework is not only a reminder to language specialists about the significance of all four domains for students' language development, but it also allows them to show colleagues who are less familiar with the process of language acquisition that language should not exclusively target any one domain.

Formative assessment. ESL teachers reported using the speaking and writing rubrics in the ELP standards for two main purposes: (a) to formatively assess their ELLs' language development and (b) to set language goals, often collaboratively with students. Educators reported using both the speaking and writing rubric to determine what students are able to do with language and what the next steps for their language development should be. Teachers may compare their own assessment of ELLs' language to the students' ACCESS score to ensure that students are solidifying language skills they have, as well as acquiring new ones. Educators also find it helpful that the rubrics break down academic language into linguistic complexity, vocabulary usage, and language control. As one educator explained, "Before we had the use of [the rubric], we were just assuming… they all need all of it. And they do not and you can really see that from the WIDA scores. And that is where those rubrics help us, and that is where those MPIs help us a lot." The WIDA rubrics thus guide educators in placing students on the trajectory of language acquisition in a way that takes into account multiple competencies. Many educators then take the next step of using their assessment of students' language to set language goals, and they involve the students in that process.

Prestige. A few of the educators who participated in the research study shared that the existence of ELP standards elevates the prestige of language specialists. This is how one ESL teacher justified her use of the standards, "I use the standards because I know that it is the best practice and I believe that ESL teachers should be held to the same standards as general educators. And if general educators are required to write standards, ESL teachers should be as well. Then I will present the standards first off, because sometimes they do not know we have standards." Although the mere presence of language standards may be important for ESL teachers from the perspective of professional standing, the connection between language and Common Core standards seems to also be important. One ESL teacher shared the following about the 2012 edition of the standards, "I love how [the standards] are connected to the Common Core standards. That is really, really helpful because then there is no doubt about what we do. Because sometimes people are like, 'Oh, what do you do? You play games with the kids.' Well, yes, maybe we play a game but there is a purpose to that game. But it is hard to connect it sometimes. So [the Common Core connection] would be really good." Connecting language instruction to career and

college readiness standards may increase the relevance of language instruction in the eyes of general education teachers.

Confirmation. The ELP standards confirm some of the key principles that ESL teachers use to guide their instruction, including the following: focusing on the language of the disciplines as well as social and instructional language, integrating all four language domains, and tapping into students' first language. The standards provide this support to ESL teachers as they reflect on their own practice and as they communicate with mainstream educators and administrators. As one ESL teacher shared, "It is very common for homeroom teachers to try to get me to finish what they do not have time for. And then I have my own curriculum and standards that I need to accomplish, not their curriculum and standards. So although Common Core is a wonderful set of standards and I try to align as much as I can, those are not my ultimate standards. My ultimate standards are the language of, not the content." A third ESL teacher commented on the relationship between the ELP and Common Core standards in terms of social instructional language, "[The ELP standards] give me justification to teach curriculum that is not covered by the content standards, the Common Core, but is covered by WIDA's social and instructional standards, which I know are necessary for students' growth and language acquisition." The ELP standards support ESL teachers in defining and defending what language instruction entails, as the teachers interact with other educators at their schools.

The ways in which the standards framework supports the integration of all language domains in language instruction was alluded to previously in this report. Many ESL teachers find themselves asked to justify instruction that incorporates all language domains when general education teachers perceive that students need support in the acquisition of only one domain, usually writing.

One educator who participated in the study mentioned that the ELP standards help her defend her choice of allowing her students to use their first language in her classroom. In the standards, students' first language is listed as an appropriate instructional support for beginning ELLs. The ESL teacher reported that she interacts with teachers who say that "students should only speak English because this is America." The standards, however, give her license to claim that support in the first language is important for students' academic success.

These examples illustrate that educators can make use of different components of the standards to guide their instructional design and to advocate for the needs of their ELLs.

Supporting Full Use of the WIDA Standards

We can learn a number of lessons from the ways in which educators across the consortium do or do not take advantage of the resources provided in the WIDA standards.

- *Professional development for district language coordinators.* There is a clear relationship between the views and goals of the district coordinator and the use of the WIDA standards by educators in a district. Many coordinators report that they are supported by their state in learning about the WIDA standards, though many others share that their professional learning depends exclusively on their own initiative. Some of the opportunities for professional learning that district coordinators value most are similar to those that ESL teachers find useful: they are sustained, collaborative, and hands-on. As with teachers, support for coordinators can take multiple forms: from attendance at trainings and conference sessions on the standards to participation in inter-districts networks that allow coordinators with similar student demographics to learn from each other. The findings of the report suggest that the professional development opportunities for district coordinators are a matter that deserves serious consideration.

- *Professional development for ESL teachers.* To take full advantage of the WIDA standards, ESL educators require opportunities for sustained, collaborative, and meaningful professional development. They need to be able to take time away from the classroom and design units that support ELL students' language development. This time can take place during the school year or in the summer and involve multiple ways of developing expertise, but it has to exist. Furthermore, the professional development opportunities available to ESL teachers need to span several years. Many educators commented on the ways in which their understanding of the standards has evolved over the years. ESL teachers reported greatly valuing professional development that is collaborative and includes teams of general education teachers, ESL teachers, and administrators. Finally, ESL educators find professional development most meaningful when it supports them in working with the WIDA standards to design language instruction and assessment.

  Two topics seem essential to include in such professional development for ESL teachers. The first topic is the formative assessment of ELLs for language. Most educators report relying exclusively on ACCESS scores when placing students on the Can Do Descriptors and planning for instruction. This complete reliance on ACCESS is, however, both inappropriate (given the purpose of the test) and inadequate. Several ESL teachers shared that they struggle when they realize that their students do not have the language competencies expected based on the ACCESS scores. Other ESL teachers who use multiple sources of data to inform their instruction do not report having the same difficulties in tailoring their instruction to the language strengths and needs of their students.

  ESL teachers are the vehicle though which mainstream educators become exposed to resources for language differentiation, if at all. It thus seems essential for states and districts to invest in professional development that can guide ESL staff in working with general education teachers to help them better meet the needs of ELLs. What makes this issue particularly complex is the multiplicity of contexts in which teachers interact with one another. These contexts include but are not limited to co-teaching, push-in situations, in-services for school staff, planning meetings, and informal conversations. In some districts, ESL teachers receive support in this regard from ESL instructional coaches and their district coordinator. In other district, such support is scarce.

- *Collaboration among teachers.* The formal opportunities that ESL teachers have to collaborate with general education teachers affect greatly the relationships among the educators and depend significantly on whether or not the teachers have common planning time available. ESL teachers who have opportunities to co-teach with mainstream teachers or who push into general education classrooms reported feeling less isolated. They shared that these frequent opportunities for collaboration allow general education teachers to learn more about what ESL teachers do, and to appropriate many of the strategies ESL teachers use to differentiate for language and support the language development of ELLs. As mentioned earlier in the report, the nature of the collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers is closely related to their use of WIDA resources, and in particular the Can Do Descriptors.

The implementation of the WIDA standards at the district level is a complex process that depends on many factors. Some of these factors, such as the professional development support available to district coordinators, are the purview of the state. Others, such as the availability of common planning time for ESL and general education teachers, depend on the building principal. There is thus no one single silver bullet that can ensure that educators take full advantage of what WIDA has to offer. Instead, the process of using language standards clearly requires a systems approach.

Limitations to the Standards

English language proficiency or development standards can support language educators in providing high quality instruction for their ELLs but they cannot guarantee that the needs of language minority students will be met. The standards do and will continue to have important limitations. It is important to realize that language standards:

- Are not a curriculum or scope and sequence standards. They will always consist only of examples that reflect a general trajectory of language development. The standards are generative rather than prescriptive. The abstractness and flexibility that characterize them are a significant drawback to their use by many ESL and most general education teachers.
- Cannot list *all* the language competencies that students need to develop in order to be academically successful. This is especially true for students in higher grades and more advanced levels of proficiency. Language standards should thus always be used in conjunction with challenging content standards that delineate the kinds of knowledge and skills that students are expected to need in order to be college and career ready.
- Address factors other than academic language that affect students' success only indirectly. Such factors include ELL students' motivation to complete academic work, the social identities fostered in classrooms, and the relationships between school and parents, to name a few.

Language standards lend themselves to a variety of uses and those uses depend on a range of factors. Ultimately, language standards are always incomplete.

WIDA's Vision for the Use of its Resources

This report concludes with a brief discussion of WIDA's vision for the ways that educators may use some of the resources it provides. Parts of this vision are implicit in the standards and are evolving. This section also discusses ways in which the 2012 edition of the standards strives to address some of the shortcomings in the 2007 edition that are also visible in this report.

WIDA views the Can Do Descriptors as tools that should be used for language differentiation but not goal setting or progress monitoring. As discussed previously in this report, what WIDA defines as correct and incorrect usage is not clearly stated in documents that discuss the Can Do Descriptors but is discussed consistently by WIDA trainers.

WIDA believes that *every teacher is a language teacher.* This view is reflected in the integration of content and language that is reflected in the five standards as well as in every MPI. In addition, WIDA strives to promote a focus on *language development* as well as language differentiation that seeks to provide access to content. WIDA is aware that students need to be sophisticated and critical language users in order to flourish, and that this sophistication and metalinguistic awareness can only be achieved through a sustained and meaningful focus on language development in the context of high intellectual challenge. This vision remains implicit in the 2012 edition of the WIDA standards, just as it was in the 2007 edition.

WIDA intends for MPIs to provide consistency in language instruction in two respects: Through a focus on a high cognitive engagement for students of all levels of language proficiency, and through an iterative focus on a unifying language function. The 2007 edition of the standards was not explicit about the relationship between language and cognitive functions and many educators drew the conclusion documented in this report: That only students at high levels of language proficiency should be asked to analyze or compare and contrast. Only one educator who participated in the study mentioned that the WIDA MPIs support the engagement of all students in cognitively demanding tasks, and she

admitted having come to that conclusion after years of use of the standards and a close reading of the strands. WIDA made an attempt to address the ambiguous relationship between language and cognitive function in the third edition of the standards. The 2012 edition highlights the cognitive functions in which students are engaged as they learn language with the intention of encouraging educators to ensure that all language learners can participate in cognitively challenging instructional tasks. Given the close relationship between language and conceptual understanding, this is a daunting task that often requires the use of resources teachers may not have (such as speakers of and materials in the student's home language). Despite the enormity of the challenge, WIDA documents convey that engaging students with divergent language skills in the same intellectually challenging tasks is essential for their academic success and needs to be supported.

WIDA envisions that the strands of MPIs can provide consistency in language instruction by encouraging educators to explore different types of discourse over time. The 2007 standards were written in a way that encouraged educators to treat language functions independently of each other. Many educators who participated in the study shared performance indicators in which, just like in the WIDA document, students of different ELP levels are engaged in producing or interpreting different types of discourse. The 2012 edition strives to remedy this fragmented view of discourse by describing example contexts for language use that provide a unifying language function and, whenever possible, preserve the same language function within a whole strand. A focus on a unifying language function for the duration of several lessons or a unit fosters familiarity with a particular type of discourse, and allows teachers and students to delve into the relationships between meaning and form at multiple levels of language (phrase, sentence, and discourse). Although the language function cannot always be preserved across a strand, WIDA strives to illustrate that the distinctions take into account students' different language skills but that all students are engaged in mastering the same discourse over time. Finally, by preserving the same language function across language proficiency levels WIDA intends to send the message that the same types of discourse can be revisited several times during an academic year as students grow in their language proficiency. Returning to the same type of discourse allows students to engage in it differently than they did before and so deepens their understanding of the language features, values, and ways of thinking that characterize that type of discourse.

WIDA strives to acknowledge that language development always takes place in a specific context, and that the contexts of learning are complex. WIDA is growing in its ability to promote conversations that situate language skills and language development in the context of each student's participation in a classroom learning community. The 2012 edition of the standards makes an attempt to support conversations about the environment in which student learning takes place by stating that "the features of academic language operate within a sociocultural context for language use" and providing examples of elements that constitute that context. It remains to be seen whether and how the explicit reference to social context in the standards may support high quality instruction for ELLs.

WIDA has and will continue to learn from the talented language educators who are engaged in the challenging tasks of providing ELLs with the high quality education they deserve. We are greatly indebted to all of you!

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WIDA RESEARCH REPORT

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