

Supporting English Learners with Disabilities

Shared, Collaborative Decision-Making for ELP Assessments



OKLAHOMA
Education



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Session Focus

- English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessment decisions
- ACCESS / Alternate ACCESS participation
- Appropriate use of accommodations
- Goal: Strengthen collaboration between EL and SPED teams in assessment decision-making

Why This Matters

ELs with Disabilities

Require both language and accommodation review.

Without collaboration of Special Education and EL teams:

- Assessment pathways may be incorrect.
- Accommodations may not match student needs.
- Assessment decisions (WIDA ACCESS vs WIDA Alternate) directly impact how we understand student ability.

Two Areas of Expertise, One Assessment Decision

Language Development:

- Understanding English language proficiency levels
- Interpreting WIDA expectations
- Using language supports ensure access

Disability & Access Needs:

- Ensuring equitable access to language assessments
- Recognizing individual accessibility needs
- Using accommodations to support meaningful participation

ELP (English Language Proficiency) Assessments

ELP Assessment Participation Requirements

- All ELs must participate in an annual ELP assessment.
- No disability exempts a student from participation.

What are the ELP assessment decisions?

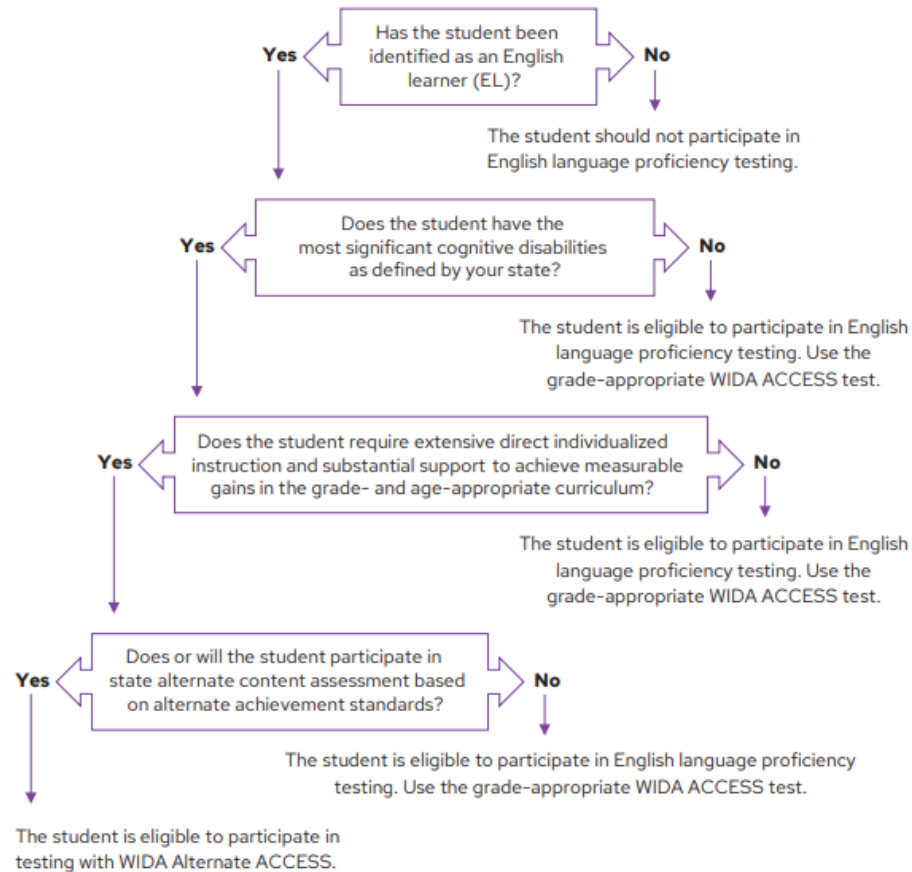
- WIDA ACCESS vs. WIDA Alternate
- Selection of accommodations
- Domain participation (if applicable)
 - Considering access across language domains

State Definition of “students with the most significant cognitive disabilities” 34 CFR § 200.6(d)(1)

Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities have limited conceptual skills, written language skills, and understanding of numerical concepts such as quantity, time, and money. Vocabulary and grammar are quite limited and augmentative communication devices are often necessary to communicate with others. They tend to focus on present, everyday events and rarely attempt to analyze or expand on new ideas and concepts through spoken language. Skill acquisition and measurable gains on grade-level alternate academic achievement standards require extensive, direct individualized instruction. These students require substantial supports for all activities of daily living including meal preparation, dressing, grooming, and personal hygiene. Their personal safety is dependent upon constant supervision and will be a concern throughout their lifetime.

WIDA Alternate ACCESS Participation Decision Tree

WIDA Alternate ACCESS Participation Decision Tree



Assessment participation decisions must be made by an IEP team, not an individual. Check with your state education agency on specific criteria for identifying ELs with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Accommodations & Accessibility Supports

Guiding Principles for English Learners with Disabilities

- Accessibility and accommodations should support meaningful participation in all language domains.
- Decisions should be individualized based on the student's language, disability-related needs, and communication system.
- Accommodations should reflect supports regularly used during instruction.
- Consider the student's mode of communication, assistive technology, and access needs.
- Determine testing mode (online or paper) in advance; mixed-mode testing is not allowed.

WIDA Accommodations Manual 26-27

Accommodations Available		
Accommodation	Domain(s)	Test Format
ACCESS Paper Braille	R, W, L, S	ACCESS Paper
Extended Speaking Test Response Time	S	ACCESS Online / Paper
Extended Testing of a Test Domain Over Multiple Days	R, W, L, S	All tests
In Person Human Reader	L, S, W	ACCESS Online / Paper
Repeat In Person Human Reader	L, S, W	ACCESS Paper / Online
Interpreter Signs Test Directions in ASL	R, W, L, S	All tests
Large Print	R, W, L, S	ACCESS Paper, Kindergarten ACCESS
Assistive Technology	R, W, L, S	ACCESS Online

WIDA Accommodations Manual 26-27

Accommodations Available

Accommodation	Domain(s)	Test Format
Low Vision Script	R, W, L, S	Kindergarten ACCESS
Manual Control of Audio Item	R, W, L, S	ACCESS Paper, Braille
Repeat Audio Item	L, S, W	ACCESS Paper / Online
Scribe	L, S, W	All tests
Recording Device and Transcription	W	All tests
Test Administered in a Non-School Setting	R, W, L, S	All tests
Word Processor or Similar Keyboarding Skills	R, W, L, S	All tests
Speech to Text	W	ACCESS Paper / Online

Considerations: Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Consider how the student can meaningfully participate in each language domain.
- Student may participate in Reading and Writing domains with few or no accommodations.
- In-Person Human Reader may support students who use speech reading (for listening, speaking, and writing domains).
- Paper-based ACCESS may provide more opportunities for speech reading and flexibility.
- Mixed-mode testing is not allowed (online + paper across domains).
- Listening and Speaking domain exemptions should only be considered when the student cannot meaningfully participate, even with allowable accommodations and supports.

Considerations: Blind or Visually Impaired

- Students with low vision may participate in online testing using built-in magnification tools.
- Paper-based testing, large print, CCTV, or document cameras may provide additional access supports.
- Determine in advance which test mode best allows the student to demonstrate English language skills.
- Mixed-mode testing is not allowed (online + paper across domains). Braille materials are available for WIDA ACCESS only for students proficient in braille.

Supporting Student Response on WIDA ACCESS & Alternate

Common Misconception

- *Students who do not use verbal speech or write with a pencil should be exempt from speaking and writing domains.*

What WIDA Allows

- **AAC** devices may be considered the student's voice.
- Multiple response methods (e.g., pointing, eye gaze, selecting responses, general words)
- Scribes may record student-indicated responses from multiple response methods for writing.

Supporting Student Response with an Accommodation with WIDA ACCESS AND Alternate

Scribe (SR)

This accommodation is available for:

☒ **all tests**

In these domains:

☒ **Listening**

☒ **Reading**

☒ **Writing**

To provide this accommodation, a test administrator or another designated individual responds in the online test platform or in a test booklet as directed by a student. For example, a student might provide verbal dictation of a Writing response, which the scribe types or writes. A student might indicate a response to a multiple-choice question using a speech-to-text device, using a picture or word board, by pointing, or with eye gaze, and the scribe selects or marks the option indicated.

Supporting Student Response in WIDA Alternate

What This Looks Like in Practice

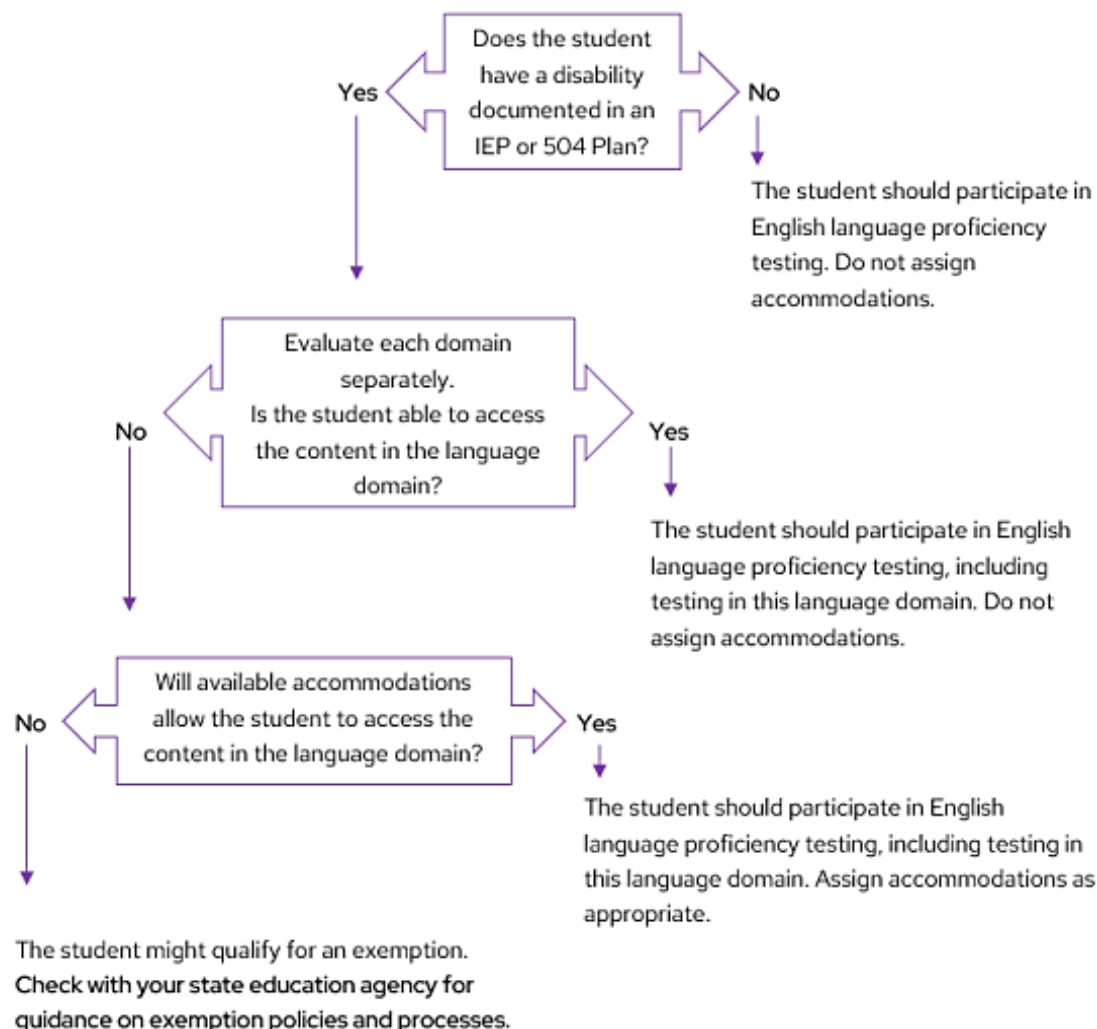
- Student selects or indicates responses using AAC, pointing, or eye gaze.
- Test administrator/scribe records the response.
- Responses do not have to be verbally produced.

When a Disability Impacts Access: What's Next?

- Appropriate accommodations must be provided first.
- Team-based decisions are required.
- Domain exemptions are rare and require state approval using a state form submitted by your EL District testing coordinator.
 - Use the domain exemption decision tree as a guide.

WIDA Domain Exemption Decision Tree

Domain Exemption Decision Tree



Always follow state-specific accessibility and accommodation policies for English language proficiency tests.
State guidance may vary from the recommendations in this document.

Collaboration in ELP Assessment Decision-Making

What does it look like?

Collaboration in Assessment Decision-Making Looks Like

- Ongoing communication between teams
- Shared input on accommodations
- EL staff participation in IEP discussions regarding ELP assessments
- Special Education staff input on accessibility during testing

Collaboration in Assessment Guiding Questions

- Determine Assessment Participation
 - Should this student participate in ACCESS or Alternate ACCESS?
 - Who needs to be involved?
- Bring Both Lenses
 - What do current EL data and IEP/SPED data each tell us?
- Evaluate WIDA Supports/Accommodations First
 - What accommodations/supports have been tried, and how effective were they?
- Plan & Assign Responsibility
 - What is our plan moving forward, and who is responsible?
 - Do we need amend to the IEP?

Scenario Practices

Scenario 1

A 6th grade student with an IEP for a significant cognitive disability is also an EL. The student will be taking the OAAP this year. The team feels the student cannot complete the writing domain. Student uses an AAC device to communicate in the classroom and during instruction.

Discussion Questions:

- What assessment decision needs to be made?
- What accommodations and accessibility supports should be considered first?
- Does the student's disability impact assessment access? How?
- What are the most appropriate next steps for the team?

Scenario 1: What should we see on the IEP?

CURRENT ASSESSMENTS

According to the review of the current assessment data and the team's decision, this student will participate in an Alternate Assessment. ☒ Yes ☐ No

STATE/DISTRICT MANDATED TESTS	
State/District Assessment	Accommodation(s)
Oklahoma Alternate Assessment Program (OAAP)	Participating
Alternate ACCESS	WIDA-Scribe (excludes speaking)

Scenario 2

A 3rd grade student's primary disability is identified as Deaf/Hard of Hearing and met the qualifications to be an EL. The student communicates using sign language during instruction and is learning to lip read. The student participates in general education classes with interpreter support and accesses instruction through signed communication and visual supports.

Discussion Questions:

- What assessment decision needs to be made?
- What accommodations and accessibility supports should be considered first?
- Does the student's disability impact assessment access? How?
- What are the most appropriate next steps for the team?

Scenario 2: What should we see on the IEP? Domain Exemption form?

STATE/DISTRICT MANDATED TESTS	
State/District Assessment	Accommodation(s)
WIDA ACCESS 2.0	With Accommodations • SD WIDA-Interpreter signs instructions, test directions and practice items in ASL (applicable to all domains but not response options, passages, or test items) • ACCESS for ELLS paper

Domain Exemption(s) Requested		Justification for Domain Exemption(s): Responses must clearly explain why the domain cannot be meaningfully measured based on the student's access and communication, even with allowable supports and accommodations.
Reading	☐	Describe how the student accesses texts during instruction, and why the Reading domain cannot be meaningfully assessed, even with allowable supports and accommodations. Response:
Writing	☐	Describe how the student express ideas during instruction (for example scribe, keyboard, AAC, eye gaze) and/or why and why the Writing domain cannot be meaningfully assessed even with allowable supports and accommodations. Response:
Speaking	☒	Describe how the student communicates during instruction (for example, using ASL, AAC, amplification, gestures, or eye gaze) and explain why the Speaking domain cannot be meaningfully assessed, even with allowable supports and accommodations. Response: Student has severe to profound bilateral hearing loss and does use amplification technology. Student communicate using signed communication and is learning to lip read.
Listening	☒	Describe how the student receives language during instruction (for example, through ASL, visuals, or amplification) and explain why the Listening domain cannot be meaningfully assessed, even with allowable supports and accommodations. Response: Student has severe to profound bilateral hearing loss and does use amplification technology. Student communicate using signed communication and is learning to lip read.

Important Timelines & Resources

ELP Assessment Domain Exemption Request Form

ELP Assessment Domain Exemption Request Form

Purpose

This form documents IEP/504 team decisions about whether a student's disability prevents reliable measurement of a specific ACCESS/AIT ACCESS language domain, even after all supports and accommodations have been used.

Federal and State Laws

State and federal laws require all ELs to participate in the annual ELP assessment including students with IEPs and 504 Plans. No disability exempts a student from this requirement. However, when all appropriate universal tools and design and accommodations have been offered and the student's disability remains a barrier to assessing a particular language domain, the student may qualify for a domain exemption if certain conditions are met.

IEP – 504 Plan

The IEP team must look at all WIDA accommodations available to the students before applying for an exemption in a particular domain(s). Decisions to request to exempt a student from a domain(s) should be made by the full team, including an EL representative. A disability category alone (e.g., autism, deaf, nonverbal) is not sufficient. Teams must describe how the student communicates and accesses instruction, and why the domain cannot be meaningfully measured, even with supports and accommodations.

Please have the Special Education Teacher of Record and the EL District Testing Coordinator complete the domain exemption request and attach the student's IEP or 504 Plan, highlighting the requested domain exemption(s) and any additional supporting information. Teams should consult the Domain Exemption Decision Tree in the WIDA [Accessibility and Accommodations Manual](#) when making decisions. Domain requests should be written in the IEP as follows: "Domain exemption in _____ will be requested from OSDE" (as approval is not guaranteed).

Upload all documents (IEP and this completed form) to a Student Assessment ELP DVR in the Accountability Reporting application within Single Sign On. Once submitted, review the DVR comments to verify OELP approval or denial. Submissions may be made at any time; however, the deadline is December 1. We recognize that transfer and newly enrolled students may need flexibility after December 1, but the submission for these students must be made prior to the closure of the testing window and before assessing the student.

District Name:	District and County Code:	Student Testing Number (STN):
Student Name:	Student Birthdate:	Current Student Grade:

District Contact Name:	District Contact Email Address:	District Contact Phone Number:
Assessment Information for the Student: WIDA ACCESS, WIDA ACCESS for Kindergarten, WIDA ACCESS Paper, WIDA Alternate ACCESS		

Domain Exemption(s) Requested	Justification for Domain Exemption(s): Responses must clearly explain why the domain cannot be meaningfully measured based on the student's access and communication, even with allowable supports and accommodations.
Reading ☐	Describe how the student accesses texts during instruction, and why the Reading domain cannot be meaningfully assessed, even with allowable supports and accommodations. Response:
Writing ☐	Describe how the student express ideas during instruction (for example scribe, keyboard, AAC, eye gaze) and why the Writing domain cannot be meaningfully assessed even with allowable supports and accommodations. Response:
Speaking ☐	Describe how the student communicates during instruction (for example, using ASL, AAC, amplification, gestures, or eye gaze) and why the Speaking domain cannot be meaningfully assessed, even with allowable supports and accommodations. Response:
Listening ☐	Describe how the student receives language during instruction (for example, through ASL, visuals, or amplification) and why the Listening domain cannot be meaningfully assessed, even with allowable supports and accommodations. Response:

Signing below, I affirm the following:

- ☐ The student has a documented disability (IEP or 504 Plan).
- ☐ The IEP/504 team reviewed allowable accommodations in the [WIDA Accessibility & Accommodations Manual](#) and [Guidance on WIDA Accessibility and Accommodations](#) prior to this request.
- ☐ No allowable accommodation enables participation in the requested domain(s).

Federal regulations require annual ELP assessment participation for all ELs, including students with disabilities; domain exemptions must be submitted for approval only when supported by the IEP/504 team after reviewing all allowable accommodations.

Title:	Name:	Signature:
Special Education Teacher of Record		
EL District Testing Coordinator		

After Approval in the Student Assessment ELP DVR (remember submissions do not grant approval, please review the DVR comments for approval):

For WIDA ACCESS Online: If approved, OELP will enter the Do Not Score code "SPD" in WIDAAMS for all approved domain exemptions and will contact the LEA with next steps in the DVR.

For WIDA Alternate, WIDA ACCESS Paper, or WIDA ACCESS for Kindergarten: If approved, OELP will notify you to bubble the Do Not Score code "SPD" on the test booklet cover as applicable for all approved domain exemptions in the DVR.

Important Deadlines

- In October:
 - Check dually identified students' IEPs, review that accommodations have been reviewed and entered
 - WIDA Alternate decision tree reviewed especially for students in non state testing program years
 - Target Deadline for Domain Exemptions: December 1st
 - We recognize that transfer and newly enrolled students may need flexibility, but this remains the overall goal.

Resources

- [ELP Assessment Domain Exemption Request Form](#) - Updated 8/11/26
 - OELP will require this form to be completed and submitted in a Student Assessment ELP DVR. Once submitted, please see the comments in the DVR to verify the OELP's approval or denial. **Target deadline December 1st.**
- [WIDA Accommodations Checklists](#)
- WIDA PD self paced course *(You will need a WIDA Secure Portal Log in):
 - Supporting Multilingual Learners with Disabilities in Language and Communication
 - Understanding WIDA Alternate ACCESS Score Reports 2027

Thank you!

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