



**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA**  
**Department of Education**

**DATE:** June 9, 2017  
**TO:** Division Superintendents  
**FROM:** Steven R. Staples, Superintendent of Public Instruction  
**SUBJECT: English Proficiency Criteria for ACCESS for ELLS® 2.0 English Language Proficiency (ELP) Assessment - 2016-2017 Assessment Year**

The purpose of this memorandum is to communicate a change in the criteria for English Learners (ELs) to demonstrate proficiency in English on the ACCESS for ELLS® 2.0 English Language Proficiency (ELP) Assessment administered in 2016-2017.

As required in the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), school divisions must annually assess the English proficiency of ELs. To comply with this requirement, Virginia administers the ACCESS for ELLS® test developed by World-Class Instructional Design Assessment (WIDA) consortium as the statewide ELP assessment. The ACCESS test measures students' proficiency in English in four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and also provides an overall proficiency score. ACCESS for ELLS® scores are reported in terms of six proficiency levels, with Level 1 the lowest level of English proficiency and Level 6 the highest. Since 2010, ELs have been required to obtain an overall proficiency score of 5.0 or greater and a literacy (reading and writing) score of 5.0 or greater on Tier B or C of the ACCESS for ELLS® test to be identified as proficient in English and exit Limited English Proficient (LEP) status.

During the 2015-2016 assessment year, WIDA released new assessments – the ACCESS for ELLS® 2.0 – which were administered in Virginia in the spring of 2016. Standards setting committees, composed primarily of educators, met in the summer of 2016 to recommend the minimum scores required for students to be classified into each proficiency level. Overall, the recommendations made by the WIDA standards-setting committees and adopted by WIDA resulted in higher scale score to proficiency level minimum scores across all domains. In some areas, the English language proficiency expectations increased significantly.

ACCESS for ELLS® scores from the spring 2016 test administration were provided to states on both the OLD scale used prior to 2015-2016 and the NEW scale resulting from the summer 2016 standard setting committees' recommendations. In communicating the new score scale, WIDA noted that, if states maintain the previously used criteria for determining English proficiency, expectations for reaching proficiency will be higher because of changes in the score scale. For states considering making changes to the English proficiency criteria, WIDA recommended comparing student scores on the old scale and the new scale to inform a new set of criteria. WIDA also recommended that states avoid using domain scores as part of new English proficiency criteria. In particular, states were cautioned against using writing domain scores, as this skill is the last to develop and bears the greatest impact of the new scale.

To determine whether an adjustment in the English proficiency criteria was needed for the new ELP assessments in Virginia, 2015-2016 assessment scores were compared using the old and new scales. Students who had an overall proficiency level of 5.0 or greater and a literacy proficiency level of 5.0 or greater on the old ACCESS scale had overall proficiency scores on the new scale ranging from 3.8 to 4.4 depending on the grade level. Based on WIDA's advice, domain scores were not considered in identifying exit criteria on the new scale.

Based on the comparison above, and taking into account feedback received during multiple stakeholder meetings on possible changes to the English proficiency criteria, Virginia has decided to use an overall proficiency score of 4.4 as the ACCESS for ELLS® English proficiency criterion for the 2016-2017 assessment year. This criterion is consistent with the score comparison conducted between the old and the new scales. During the summer of 2017, the ACCESS for ELLS® 2.0 data from the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 assessment years will be reviewed to determine long-term English proficiency criteria using the new scale.

Additional information, including identification guidelines aligned with the 2016-2017 ACCESS for ELLS® 2.0 English proficiency criteria and new guidance regarding the provision of accommodations for former EL students on monitor status will be provided to Title III Coordinators and Division Directors of Testing in the coming weeks.

If you have questions, please contact the student assessment staff at [student\\_assessment@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:student_assessment@doe.virginia.gov) or (804) 225-2102 or Lynn Sodat, Director, Office of Program Administration and Accountability, at [Lynn.Sodat@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:Lynn.Sodat@doe.virginia.gov) or (804) 225-2870.

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