
New York State English Language Proficiency Assessment Advisory Committee

c/o NYSABE
Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools
726 Broadway, 5th Floor
New York, NY 10003

February 5, 2021

Dr. Betty Rosa, Interim Commissioner
New York State Education Department
Albany, NY

Dear Dr. Rosa,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a recommendation about the important work of determining the best pathway for evaluating the progress of our English language learners/Multilingual learners in New York State. We know that what the department decides will have a profound impact on our students, their families and their teachers for years to come.

On behalf of all the members of the Assessment Advisory Committee, I would also like to express our gratitude to all NYSED staff whose work and spirit of collaboration demonstrated NYSED's profound commitment to provide equitable education to all New York State's English language learners/Multilingual learners.

Sincerely,

Nancy Villarreal de Adler

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Executive Director, NYSABE

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Our committee has met several times and its members have examined in depth the possibilities, including the standards and assessments of the WIDA consortium, ELPA21, and California (which like NY decided to develop its own set of standards and assessments). We compared the approaches on various key features. For example, ELPA21 was developed to measure 10 specific English Language Proficiency Standards. WIDA Access is anchored in the 5 WIDA English Language Development Standards, etc. Our comparison led us to the conclusion that NYS has all the necessary pieces and has a great deal accomplished in the service of our ELLs/MLLs. The expert panel that worked to develop (and who later endorsed) our progressions are many of the same experts enlisted by WIDA, ELPA21, and CA. We have a great deal of expertise right here in NYS and we also brought in some experts from other places. Educators across the state have done a great deal to learn about and use the progressions and other resources to raise the level of rigor for ELLs/MLLs, developing English Language Development report cards based on Targets of Measurement and Performance Level Descriptors, consolidating the available resources to make them more user friendly for educators, and much more.

We know that the goal is to make a recommendation on an assessment, however we want to urge the NYSED to take a step back and first consider what it is we believe about our students and language acquisition (our theoretical framework) and what it is we believe our students should know and be able to do (standards) and what their progress towards achieving those standards will look like at each level of proficiency (ELD/progressions). As one of the states with the largest population of multilingual learners in the country, New York has always been a leader and innovator in the field. Like other states (Texas, California) that long ago decided that they could best meet the needs of their own students by developing their own standards and assessment frameworks, New York has invested a great deal of time, treasure, and talent into developing a system that is tailored to our own students. The Bilingual Common Core Progressions were developed based on a theoretical framework grounded in dynamic bilingualism and content-based language learning that were intentionally aligned to New York State's English Language Arts and Literacy standards.

The NYSED spent 2 years and again, much expense and effort in reimagining the standards for ELA, Literacy and mathematics and in 2017 published the Next Generation standards. The preface to the Next Generation ELA and Mathematics Standards states, "ELLs/MLLs are expected to meet the same grade level standards as all other students—and each ELL/MLL is therefore entitled to instructional supports, scaffolds and services that support him or her to get there (p. 6). The introduction to the standards boasts that NYS has a long history of setting educational expectation that dates back to the 1800s. Let's make sure that our ELLs/MLLs are considered as we continue that history into the future.

Adopting a new assessment would mean adopting a new set of standards and training teachers across the state in something completely new. It would fracture instructional practices and likely result in ELLs/MLLs being taught in segregated contexts because they'd be working towards different standards than their peers. If we truly expect our ELLs/MLLs to meet the rigorous Next Generation Standards then our instructional practices and goals for English as a New Language (ENL) instruction must be grounded in those same standards from the start. We have made great progress in integrating ENL as a means of supporting our students as they progress towards the standards and adopting something different now could set us back years. Also, educators have been under a tremendous amount of stress given the pandemic and sociopolitical distress, therefore, enhancing what we have rather than bringing in something completely new would be less disruptive at this critical time.

Recommendations

Based on our extensive research, discussions, and expertise, we make the following recommendations:

1. Form a committee of educators and experts to examine, revise, and redraft our **Bilingual Common Core Progressions** to align with the NYS Next Generation standards for ELA and Literacy in the Content Areas. Follow the same collaborative and inclusive process to gain feedback and input from educators and stakeholders throughout NYS. Be sure to address the following:
 - a. Include an expanded and updated description of the theoretical framework.
 - b. Add proficiency level descriptors grounded in the NextGen ELA and Literacy Standards (separate from the NYSESLAT PLDs although these should be used as a resource).
 - c. Include and integrate the Lifelong Practices of Readers and Writers. We could really have something unique and valuable if these are envisioned through a lens of bilingualism.
 - d. Re-organize and consolidate the resources to make them more user-friendly and accessible to educators.
 - e. Plan for a complete and long-term roll-out of these updated Progressions with many and varied PD opportunities for teacher, administrators, and all stakeholders.
 2. Based on the newly developed Progressions, revise and update the **NYSESLAT** to measure our students' progress towards achieving revised Targets of Measurement and update the NYSESLAT Performance Level Descriptors to align with them. New York, like WIDA, ELPA21, etc. could partner with universities and/or test development/language acquisition experts to accomplish this and ensure the same validity and reliability that have been a hallmark of the NYSESLAT thus far.
 - a. Consider developing interim assessments and progress monitoring tools (formative assessments) to inform instruction as a next step once the new NYSESLAT is finalized.
 - b. Have computer-based and paper versions of our assessment for the greatest accessibility and least interruption to instruction.
 - c. Continue development of an alternate English language proficiency assessment for students with severe disabilities and a Spanish language assessment to align with the Home Language Arts Progressions, with other home languages to follow.
 3. Ensure that the **data** from the assessment is widely available, easily accessible, and in a form that is useful to educators for planning, instruction, and program development.
 - a. The committee learned that some districts have access to certain data from their Regional Information Centers (RICs) while others don't, because it is provided at a cost to the districts. We recommend that there be an equitable provision of the data no matter the financial resources and ability to pay.
 - b. Ensure that the data is provided in a timely manner. Schools need the data as early as possible for purposes of program planning, student placement, and scheduling.
 4. Establish a realistic timeline, or "**Road Map**" for districts that will allow them the time necessary to appropriately plan for implementation of, and professional learning about, the newly developed Progressions and NYSESLAT assessments. Involve the Regional Bilingual Education Networks (RBE-RNs) in every step of the process, but especially in the roll-out.
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Conclusion

As our recommendations reveal, we have concluded that using what we have as a basis for moving forward is the best course of action. Following this pathway could serve to re-emphasize our commitment to bilingualism, equity and diversity as well as the integration of ENL instruction into the “mainstream”. Aligning to our NYS NextGen Standards would facilitate collaborative teaching and help ensure the ENL/bilingual instruction is not relegated to some separate and unequal alternative space and that it truly fulfills the promise set forth in our Blueprint for ELL/MLL Success which states that all teachers are teachers of ELLs.

Respectfully submitted,

Assessment Advisory Committee

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