

Considerations for Educators of English Language Learners

Question: *The focus question for this brief.*

What are some considerations for selecting District-Determined Measures (DDMs) appropriate for educators who work with English Language Learners (ELLs)?

District Readiness: *Work to be completed before answering the focus question of this brief*

- Identify the district team responsible for making decisions about DDMs for educators of ELLs
- Enlist educators with expertise working with ELLs in the DDMs selection and review process

Next Steps: *Suggested next steps for districts after reading this brief.*

- Identify the different functions educators of ELLs perform and the settings in which they work in the district.
- Identify where existing DDMs are appropriate and where new measures are needed.
- Create a process to ensure that the selected DDMs provide an equal opportunity for all students to demonstrate growth.

DDM Development

This Implementation Brief is relevant to the highlighted steps:

- Selecting
- Administering
- Scoring
- Analyzing
- Adjusting

This brief is designed to address key questions and considerations for identifying DDMs for educators who work with English Language Learners (ELLs). There are approximately [75,500 English Language Learners](#) (ELLs) enrolled in public schools in the Commonwealth. Educators in a variety of roles provide instruction to ELLs in many different settings, including using sheltered English immersion (SEI) in content area instruction and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. When selecting district-determined measures (DDMs) that will be used by educators who provide instruction to ELLs, it is critical that districts consider the appropriateness of the selected measures for these students. Assessing the growth of ELLs can be complicated by the fact these students are simultaneously learning academic content and English language skills. Districts need to be intentional about understanding the content being assessed, the content the educator is responsible for teaching, and the English language proficiency levels of the student.

These Implementation Briefs are designed to provide targeted guidance focused on timely questions around the implementation of District Determined Measures. These briefs highlight important questions, resources, and approaches for districts to consider, and are not exhaustive resources on the subject. Please continue to share your own examples, suggestions, and questions with us at

Four Key Messages about Student Impact Ratings

Use Multiple Measures



DDMs and SGP are part of comprehensive evaluation system

Focus on Students



The focus of measuring student impact is improving student learning.

Build Capacity



Developing DDMs builds knowledge about assessment and data use.

Engage Educators



Educators have expertise developing and evaluating assessments.

Considerations for Educators of English Language Learners

The RETELL Initiative Background

Federal ([No Child Left Behind, 2002](#)) and state law ([G.L. c. 71A](#)) require that students identified as ELLs are provided with opportunities to receive instruction that is: (1) appropriate for their individual language proficiency level, (2) allows them to develop English language proficiency, and (3) affords them equal access to rigorous content area instruction and academic achievement alongside their native English speaking peers. According to Massachusetts General Laws, an ELL is defined as a child 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 ([M.G.L. c.71, sec. 2A](#)). In Massachusetts this means that, with limited exceptions, districts are required to provide ELLs sheltered English immersion (SEI) instruction until they are proficient in English. SEI consists of both sheltered content area instruction and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. For specific guidance on the program requirements for ELLs in Massachusetts and the processes related to identification, instruction, and reclassification of ELLs please refer to the [Transitional Guidance on Identification, Assessment, Placement, and Reclassification on English Language Learners](#).

In 2012, ESE announced [Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners](#) (RETELL) as an initiative to improve and support the academic achievement of ELLs. The three major components of the RETELL initiative are designed to strengthen teaching and learning for ELLs, they are:

- 1) required professional development about sheltering content instruction and promoting language development for ELLs (the SEI Endorsement and related courses for teachers and administrators)
- 2) a new set of English language development standards (the World-class Instructional Design and Assessment English Language Development standards – or WIDA ELD standards)
- 3) a new annual language proficiency assessment, Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State to State for ELLs (ACCESS for ELLs).

Core Academic Teachers with ELL Students in SEI Programs

Districts are likely to administer the same DDMs for both ELLs and general education students for core academic teachersⁱ who provide instruction to ELLs. These core academic teachers of ELLs are called Sheltered English Immersion (SEI) teachers because they are expected to provide instruction to ELL consistent with the [World Class Instructional Design and Assessment English Language Development Standards](#) (WIDA ELD Standards). When selecting or developing a DDM that will be used with ELLs, it is strongly recommended that districts engage English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers or other educators with expertise in ELL education to help ensure that elements of the DDM, such as word choices, are relevant to the construct being measured, and do not interfere with ELLs ability to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

Modifications: ESL educators can help identify language used in DDMs that could interfere with ELLs' ability to demonstrate their content-related learning. Ideally a DDM should be designed with ELLs in mind from the beginning; however, it may be appropriate to make modifications to an existing DDM to address language that causes unnecessary hurdles for ELLs. Language that is irrelevant to the content can cause ELLs difficulty in understanding and responding to the assessment questions. Since ELLs may have different cultural, social and schooling experiences from their English-proficient peers, educators should not assume that ELLs have

Considerations for Educators of English Language Learners

the same degree of background knowledge about certain terms, concepts, perspectives or situations. For example, if a question makes reference to Thanksgiving and an ELL is not familiar with the details of this holiday, it could interfere with his or her ability to correctly answer a given question, even though knowledge of Thanksgiving might be irrelevant to knowledge of the content actually being assessed.

A modified DDM should retain the rigor and content of the original DDM. For example, administering a third-grade social studies DDM to a sixth-grade ELL is not an appropriate modification because the underlying content in the question corresponds to a different set of grade-level standards. While adjusting the complexity of sentence structures and creating redundancy at times is appropriate (based on ELLs English proficiency level), simplifying the content is not. The two elementary-level word problems below demonstrate a modification of the language structure that does not alter the mathematical content being assessed:

Instead of:	Try:
"Jack had 30 pencils and he gave 12 of them to his friend Sarah."	"Jack had 30 pencils. He gave 12 to Sarah."
"Kara has 8 books and Mark has 13 books. How many more books does Mark have than Kara?"	"Kara has 8 books. Mark has 13 books. Who has more? How many more?"

It is also important to remember that for some subjects and courses, language represents key content that should be assessed for all students, including ELLs. For example, word problems that assess a student's understanding of which words translate to mathematical operations is an appropriate component of a DDM for some math classes. Modifications for ELLs to such DDMs should not strip the assessment of the ability to assess student understanding of the academic language. For instance, in the example above the phrase "how many more" indicates to a student that they could use subtraction to solve the problem. This use of academic language is a part of the mathematics content.

Linguistic Supports and Accessibility: Educators must create linguistic supports in assessments for ELLs that reduce content-irrelevant language demands, increase content accessibility, and ultimately ensure that ELLs have an equal chance of demonstrating their knowledge and skills. Examples of linguistic supports include, but are not limited to: providing English and first language dictionaries and glossaries to ELLs, universal tools, and extended time.

The [WIDA ELD Standards](#), the Massachusetts standards for ELLs are a useful tool in the development of DDMs. They should be referenced and used by all educators with ELLs in their classrooms. WIDA provides not only the standards for language development outcomes across content areas, but also an assessment framework that can assist educators in developing appropriate performance indicators. These indicators, called Model Performance Indicators (MPIs), help create differentiated assessments that show growth of ELLs in language of the

Determining Student Impact Implementation Brief

Considerations for Educators of English Language Learners

content, and the identify types of linguistic supports ELLs at different levels of proficiency need in order to do so.

Investigating Fairness: In order for DDMs to be appropriate and yield meaningful information, all students should have an equal chance of demonstrating growth. The first step to ensuring this occurs for ELLs is to review assessments for potentially problematic language, described earlier in this brief, and edit or remove these items and questions. After administering the assessments, districts should review results from DDMs to determine if there are systematic differences between groups of students. For example, a district should see a similar percentage of ELLs being rated as having high growth as any other group of students. In fact, since ELLs are often learning language at a rapid rate, districts need to ensure that they are setting appropriately challenging parameters for high growth. While there is no fixed percentage of students in each category, systematic differences between the determination of growth of ELLs and other students should be addressed in a fair and timely manner. This may include investigating problematic items or questions, rewriting questions or items, or determining parameters of high, moderate, and low growth appropriate specifically for ELLs. For more information see the [Implementation Brief on Investigating Fairness](#).

The Shared Responsibility of All Educators of ELLs: As a result of the [RETELL Initiative](#) (see the callout box on page 2), core academic teachers of ELLs and administrators of these teachers are acquiring new skills, knowledge, and dispositions for the education of English language learners through [SEI Endorsement courses](#). The courses are designed to help core academic teachers strengthen instruction and better support the academic achievement of ELLs. It is important to remember that the task of making DDMs appropriate measures of growth for ELLs is not just the responsibility of ESL educators, but is the shared responsibility of *all* educators of these students. The SEI Endorsement courses give limited guidance for teachers for appropriately differentiating assessments for ELLs. Therefore, the process of creating and selecting DDMs must involve other educators who have expertise in this area of ELL assessment. As educators continue to develop knowledge specific to the education and assessment of ELLs, they should be better able to identify appropriate considerations to be made in selecting DDMs for ELLs.

Shared Responsibility

Often two educators share responsibility for supporting a student to learn certain content. Districts are discouraged from trying to assign partial responsibility to educators. This approach would belie the intention of settings that involve general education teachers and ESL teachers working together to support students and sends the message that ELLs “belong” only to their ESL teachers. Educators who share responsibility for delivering specific content to ELLs should share full responsibility for these students’ growth. In so doing, the district may choose to use the same DDM with these educators. Individuals concerned about attribution should remember that there are always many factors that impact a student’s learning – another teacher is one factor among many.

Considerations for Educators of English Language Learners

ESL Educators

ESL teachers are responsible for the English Language Development/ESL component of the ELL’s program. ESL provides explicit, direct, systematic and developmentally targeted instruction in English to ELLs.ⁱⁱ As stated in [Technical Guide B](#), the highest priorities for all DDMs are that they are **aligned to content and inform instruction**. For ESL teachers, that content is English language development. Instruction must be tailored to their students’ *Levels of Language Proficiency* shown in Figure 1 below. The *Levels of Language Proficiency* describe stages of second language development, and are aligned to the *ACCESS for ELLs* assessment described in detail later in this document.ⁱⁱⁱ



Figure 1. WIDA Levels of Language Proficiency^{iv}

In order to tailor instruction and assessment to these levels, educators use the WIDA ELD standards.^v The WIDA ELD standards, performance descriptors and MPIs promote academic language development for ELLs in five core areas: social and instructional language, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, thereby providing students with the academic language needed for success in school. ESL educators should select DDMs that measure students’ growth in English language development as it relates to the WIDA ELD standards and its performance definitions.

ESL teachers are responsible for teaching a wide range of students across the *Levels of Language Proficiency*. Many ESL teachers, in fact, hold dual instructional roles in teaching both ESL and either sheltered content or content in another language in the case of Dual Language programs. DDMs for ESL educators, as with other educators, do not have to measure everything taught, or every student that they are responsible for teaching in a day; nor are ESL educators expected to implement DDMs to measure every aspect of their role. In order to inform instruction, the DDMs a district selects should provide both educators and districts with actionable data to inform practice. DDMs should also help identify areas of strength as well as areas where additional supports for the educator are needed.

Assessment - ACCESS for ELLs: State and federal laws require annual assessment and reporting of ELLs’ progress in learning subject matter content and language ([G.L. c. 71A § 7; Title III of NCLB § 3213 \(a\)\(2\)\(H\)](#)). In the 2012-2013 school year, the state retired the Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment (MEPA) and made ACCESS for ELLs (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners) the state’s English language proficiency assessment. ACCESS for ELLs is a large-scale assessment of English language proficiency given annually to ELLs in grades Kindergarten through 12. ACCESS for ELLs is designed to monitor students’ progress in acquiring academic English. It assesses social and instructional English used within the school

Determining Student Impact Implementation Brief

Considerations for Educators of English Language Learners

context as well as the language associated with language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies across the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

ACCESS for ELLs is administered in January. ESE will calculate student growth percentiles (SGPs), a [model of measuring student growth](#), by comparing each student's history of ACCESS for ELLs scores to the scores of all the other students in the state with a similar history of ACCESS for ELLs scores. The median Student Growth Percentile (median SGP) for an educator represents the exact middle SGP score for that educator's students. In other words, half of an educator's students performed above (or below) the median SGP score. The educator evaluation regulations require that statewide growth measures be used in the determination of an educator's Student Impact Rating "where available" ([603 CMR 35.09\(2\)](#)). Due to the timing of the assessment, a student's ACCESS for ELLs SGPs will represent his or her growth from one January to the next. As a result, only educators responsible for two consecutive years of the student's ESL instruction will be required to use ACCESS for ELLs SGPs as one measure to inform his or her Student Impact Rating.

While not required, districts may choose to use ACCESS for ELLs SGPs for other educators. For example, as a result of the RETELL initiative, the WIDA English Language Development standards are required to be integrated into both core content areas and ESL curricula. Therefore, core academic teachers in an SEI program are also held accountable for the language development instruction of ELLs. Districts may choose to use the ACCESS for ELLs test for SEI teachers if they deem it an appropriate measure of the educators' responsibilities (e.g., districts with a large population of ELLs or districts that have made the English language development of ELLs a district priority).

The table below provides greater detail regarding educators for whom median SGPs from the ACCESS for ELLs assessment must be used and where districts have discretion.

Student Growth Percentiles: When must they be used?	
Educator Category	Use of SGPs from ACCESS for ELLs
ELL directors and building-level administrators responsible for supporting and supervising the program of ELLs who take the ACCESS test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Required
ESL teachers who teach the same group of ELLs for two or more consecutive years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Required
ESL teachers who teach different groups of ELLs each year (i.e., teachers who only have a group of ELL students from the start of the school year until the ACCESS for ELLs test administration)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional
Core academic teachers with ELLs in SEI programs (SEI teachers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional

ESE consulted with state organizations and educators of ELLs from across the Commonwealth to develop these guidelines regarding required and optional use of SGPs from ACCESS for ELLs.

Considerations for Educators of English Language Learners

Transitioning Students: The ultimate goal of an ELL program is for students to be able to fully participate in the general education program alongside their proficient English-speaking peers. Therefore, a student's status as an ELL is temporary, as ELLs move up the English language proficiency continuum, and are eventually re-classified as Former ELLs. Students may transition out of the ELL program at different points during the school year. Likewise, students may enter ELL programs at varying points during the school year. The transitioning of students enrolled in ELL programs might make it difficult to link student learning to an individual educator for the purpose of informing the educator's Student Impact Rating. It also may be challenging to determine how much progress an educator's students made over the course of a school year when an educator's caseload of students is fluid throughout the school year.

In these cases, districts may need to identify DDMs that make an inference about a year of growth and measure the student's growth for the duration of time the educator provides instruction to a student. DDMs do not have to be administered at the same time for every student. For example, an educator may choose to administer a pre-test to an ELL when the student begins ESL instruction and a post-test before the student transitions out of the ESL program, even if that time is less than a full school year.

Example DDMs for ESL Teachers: The following DDM examples were developed in consultation with ESL teachers and ELL program directors from the [Massachusetts Association of Teachers of Other Languages \(MATSOL\)](#). Please note that these are examples of DDMs that are aligned to ESL teachers' responsibilities and informative to educators. Districts are in no way obligated to use these examples as DDMs. The examples are not exhaustive. ESE recognizes that ESL roles and responsibilities may vary across districts.

Name/Description	Purpose	How can assessment be used to measure student growth?
<p>The WIDA MODEL (Measure of Developing English Language)</p> <p>The WIDA MODEL is a series of English language proficiency assessments for Kindergarten through grade 12.</p>	<p>The WIDA MODEL can be used by educators as an identification/placement assessment for newly enrolled ELLs and as an interim progress monitoring assessment of student growth.</p>	<p>The WIDA MODEL is available in five grade cluster levels. Test items are based on model performance indicators in the WIDA ELD standards. The WIDA MODEL assesses proficiency in the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Administered twice, the WIDA MODEL can be used as a DDM to show growth in English proficiency from one administration to the next.</p>
<p>WIDA writing/speaking rubrics with district created prompts/tasks</p> <p>District-created performance assessment using WIDA writing rubric to show ELL growth in writing proficiency in English performance for ELLs, at levels 4 & 5, for grades 1-12</p>	<p>Measure English language development in the writing domain at the discourse, sentence, word/phrase levels for ELLs at levels 4 & 5.</p> <p>Note: Prompts can be designed for any ELD performance level.</p>	<p>Writing prompts will be administered at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year. They will be scored using the WIDA Writing Rubric to measure growth in writing.</p>

Considerations for Educators of English Language Learners

<p>Videotape ELLs responding to speaking prompts created by the district and scored with WIDA speaking rubric</p> <p>District created speaking prompts to show ELL growth in speaking proficiency in English for ELLs at each WIDA level.</p>	<p>Measure English language development in the speaking domain of language at the discourse, sentence and word/phrase levels for all ELLs from 1-6.</p>	<p>Speaking prompts will be administered at the beginning of the school year and end of the school year. They will be scored using the WIDA Writing Rubric. Language domain targeted to show growth is Speaking.</p>
--	---	--

Frequently Asked Questions

Do districts/educators have to use the example measures identified in this brief? The information in this brief is intended to serve as a resource and to stimulate conversations between ELL educators in districts. Districts and educators are not required to use the examples provided. In most cases, the information provided is just a starting point and will need to be further developed by educators and districts. ESE partnered with educators from the Massachusetts Association for Teachers of Other Languages to identify the examples used in this brief.

Can ESL teachers use the ACCESS for ELLs test SGP as a measure to inform their Student Impact Rating if they have had their students for less than a year? Yes, although it is not required. Due to the timing of the assessment, a student’s ACCESS for ELLs SGP will represent his or her growth from one January to the next, which presents a challenge for using a student’s ACCESS for ELLs as a measure to inform an educator’s Student Impact Rating. Districts have discretion to determine whether or not to use SGPs from ACCESS for ELLs for ESL teachers who have taught their students for less than a full year by the time of test administration (i.e., the ESL teacher taught the student from September to the time of the test administration in January).

Can core academic teachers with ELLs in SEI programs (SEI teachers) use the ACCESS for ELLs test SGP as a measure to inform their Student Impact Rating? Yes, although it is not required. ACCESS for ELLs is a large-scale assessment of English language proficiency. Year to year, ACCESS for ELLs

ESL DDM Spotlight: Quincy Public Schools

ESL educators in Quincy Public Schools have begun planning District-Determined Measures (DDMs) across various grades and levels of language proficiency. One of their key strategies has been to engage ESL teachers throughout their district in the creation and identification of measures that directly align to the content they are responsible for teaching.

For Grades 9-12, Proficiency Level 2, ESL teachers created a pre- and post- unit writing prompt that focuses on students’ ability to correctly use the past/past progressive tense. The writing sample will also be graded on students’ grammar, writing structure, subject/verb agreement, and punctuation. Following the pre- test, the teachers plan to have a series of past/past progressive tense lessons along with assessments. The lessons will focus on the proper forms of verbs and usage of the tenses. At the end of the unit the students will complete a post-unit writing prompt. The teachers developed a common rubric to score the students’ writing on both writing samples. The work by Quincy demonstrates that DDMs can, and should, align to what teachers are already doing to instruct, support, and assess their students.

Considerations for Educators of English Language Learners

shows student growth in English language development. As a result of the Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners (RETELL) initiative, the WIDA English Language Development standards are required to be integrated into both core content areas and ESL curricula. Therefore, core academic teachers in an SEI program are also held accountable for the language development instruction of ELLs. Districts may choose to use the ACCESS for ELLs test for SEI teachers if they deem it an appropriate measure of the educators' responsibilities (e.g., districts with a large population of ELLs or districts that have made the English language development of ELLs a district priority).

Can I use the same DDM for both my ELL students and general education students? Yes. When using the same DDM for ELLs and general education students, districts will engage ESL educators and specialists in the process of reviewing DDMs to minimize features of the DDM that are irrelevant to what is being measured, so that all students can more accurately demonstrate their knowledge and skills. If necessary, DDMs should be modified for content-irrelevant language and appropriate accommodations should be made for ELLs in order to give them an equal opportunity to demonstrate growth.

In addition to consulting with educators with expertise in ELL education about whether a DDM is appropriate for ELLs, if districts choose to use commercially designed assessments as DDMs, they will check with the assessment developer to ensure that they are designed and “normed” for use with ELL students. If they are not, and do not contain modifications empirically validated for use with ELLs, then it is likely that the assessment or instrument is not a good measure to use with ELLs.

ⁱ Core academic teachers are defined by [603 CMR 7.02](#) for purposes of sheltered English immersion instruction as early childhood and elementary teachers, teachers of students with moderate disabilities, teachers of students with severe disabilities, and teachers of the following academic subjects: English, reading and language arts, mathematics, science, civics and government, economics, history, and geography.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/TransitionalGuidance.pdf>, 13.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/wida/Guidance-p1.pdf>, 5.

^{iv} <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/wida/Guidance-p1.pdf>, 5.

^v The new regulations under RETELL require school districts to integrate the WIDA ELD standards into general education classes where ELLs participate.