

Alternate Screener Guidelines

The WIDA Alternate Screener is a pencil-and-paper English language proficiency assessment individually administered to new students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in grades K–12 who qualify or will qualify for the state Alternate Assessment. It helps educators identify if students are English learners at the time of enrollment. The WIDA Alternate Screener was made available to WIDA Consortium member states on July 1, 2025.

WIDA Alternate Screener assesses each of the four language domains (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing) and is anchored in the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Edition.

These guidelines explain how LEAs determine student eligibility for the Alternate Screener and use it for making EL status determinations.

Alternate Screener overview

The WIDA Alternate Screener:

- Can be administered at any time during the school year
- Is administered and scored locally by trained raters
- Takes no more than 30 minutes total to complete (testing times will vary based upon student needs)

An online score calculator generates score reports that give proficiency level scores for each language domain and for four composite scores: Oral Language, Literacy, Comprehension and Overall.

LEAs can read more about the screener and download materials and resources from the WIDA [Alternate Screener webpage](#).

Materials available on the WIDA Secure Portal include:

- Test administrator training course
- WIDA Alternate Screener Test Administrator Manual
- WIDA Alternate Screener Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing Test Booklet (grade clusters K-2, 3-5 and 6-12)
- WIDA Alternate Screener Test Administrator Script (grade clusters K-2, 3-5 and 6-12)
- WIDA Alternate Student Response Booklet
- Score report guidance in the WIDA Screener Interpretive Guide for Score Reports

Test administrator guidelines

The WIDA Alternate Screener may be administered by any teachers or paraprofessionals who:

- 1) successfully complete the WIDA training modules associated with the assessment they will conduct and
- 2) pass the speaking and writing quizzes with a score of 80% or better.

Review of resources prior to using the Alternate Screener

Special Education and ESL staff must collaborate to determine if a student is eligible for the Alternate Screener. Prior to engaging in the process, all staff involved must review the following resources:

[Tell Us About Your Child Survey](#)

[Alternate Proficiency Level Descriptors](#)

[WIDA Alternate Can Do Descriptors](#)

[Accessibility and Accommodations Manual](#)

Eligibility guidelines

Students are eligible for the WIDA Alternate Screener if they are or will be eligible for the state alternate assessment. Please see the [Pennsylvania Alternate System of Assessment](#) webpage for more information on eligibility for the state alternate assessment.

NOTE: Step 1 in the eligibility for the state alternate assessment is concerned with the grade level in which the student is enrolled. Step 1 should be skipped for this purpose because ELs take the annual ELP assessment in all grades. Only steps 2-6 should be applied to determine if an EL is or will be eligible for the state alternate assessment and, therefore, the Alternate Screener.

Refer to Step 3 and Appendix A of the [K-12 English Learner Identification Procedure](#).

If a student arrives with an IEP or is suspected of having a disability (i.e. parent informs enrollment personnel that the student has a disability), then enrollment personnel must coordinate with Special Education staff to make a determination about eligibility for the Alternate Screener.

Students who arrive *without* an IEP

An enrolling student who is a potential EL does not need an IEP at the time of enrollment to be eligible for the Alternate Screener if the Special Education personnel determine that the student will most likely receive one and that the student substantially meets requirements 2-6 of the state alternate assessment criteria. If this determination cannot be made at the time of enrollment, then the student should be screened with the other authorized screening instruments.

Students who are determined to be eligible for the Alternate Screener after initial identification

If an English learner was originally screened with the standard tools because the team couldn't confirm eligibility for the state alternate assessment at enrollment, but the student is later found eligible for the state alternate assessment, the student may be re-screened using the Alternate Screener.

If the results of the subsequent screening using the Alternate Screener would not have resulted in identifying the student as an EL, then the LEA may submit a request to the PDE Office of Data Quality to remove the EL label in PIMS and identify the student as never-EL.

Procedure for identifying ELs using the Alternate Screener

1. Student enrolls, parent/guardian presents an IEP or notifies the school that the student has a significant cognitive disability, **AND** the HLS indicates a language other than English.
2. Enrollment personnel notify Special Education and ESL staff.
3. ESL and/or Special Education staff administer the WIDA *Tell Us About Your Child Survey* in accordance with WIDA guidelines.

4. ESL and Special Education staff review the information from the survey, the parent interview, and any other available information to determine if the student is or will likely be eligible for the state alternate assessment.
5. If the student is or will be eligible for the state alternate assessment, then designated staff administer the Alternate Screener.
6. The results of the Alternate Screener are used to determine if the student is an EL.

Identification criteria

To be considered proficient in English and therefore not identified as an EL, a student must achieve an overall composite proficiency score of **4.0 or higher**. This criterion aligns with the state's definition of English proficiency on the Alternate ACCESS assessment.

Options for screening

Use of the Alternate Screener is optional. LEAs may administer the Alternate Screener, another approved instrument, or both. When both are administered, the LEA may determine which score and its corresponding criteria to apply for identification purposes.

For example, if a 4th grade student does not qualify as an EL under the Alternate Screener but does qualify under the WIDA Screener or MODEL Screener, the LEA may use either score at its discretion to make the identification determination.