

What is WIDA?

A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

This guide will help parents/guardians of students who have been or may be identified as English learners (or non-native English speakers) learn more about the WIDA tests. It contains answers to many frequently asked questions about the WIDA assessments. If you have additional questions, contact your child's school first to discuss your concerns directly with them. If you still need assistance, contact:

Michigan Department of Education

Office of Educational Assessment & Accountability

- email: mde-oeaa@michigan.gov
- phone: 877-560-8378

Why does my student need to take this test?

To understand why your child may be required to take the WIDA test, you need to understand the different types of WIDA tests.

There are two types of WIDA tests:

- A screener test (WIDA Screener)
- A summative yearly test (WIDA ACCESS for ELLs/ WIDA Alternate ACCESS for ELLs)

WIDA Screener

The WIDA Screener is a federally required test given to students upon enrollment into a Michigan school district. Students only need to take the WIDA Screener once. Its purpose is to determine if a student needs additional support in learning the English language.

Students are required to take the WIDA Screener based on the results of a home language survey (HLS), or questionnaire, that is included in the school's enrollment forms. In Michigan, the questions that a school district must include in their enrollment forms are:

1. Is your child's native tongue a language other than English?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

2. Is the primary language* used in your child's home or environment a language other than English?

- c. Yes
- d. No

*Primary language means "dominant language used by a person for communication"

If a parent or guardian answers "yes" to either question, the student must take the WIDA Screener. A student will be identified as an English learner based on their screener score. A low score indicates that the student would likely benefit from additional instructional services designed to help them improve their academic English proficiency in Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking.

A student who takes the WIDA Screener and scores 5.0 or higher on each domain of the assessment (listening, reading, writing, and speaking) is not identified as an English learner.

You can learn more about the scores necessary to qualify a student for English learner services in "Michigan's Entrance and Exit Protocol" or you can talk to the English Learner Coordinator in your district. As a parent or guardian, you can decide if you want your child to receive these additional services. However, a parent/guardian cannot waive the federal requirement for their student to be tested.

The sole intent of the laws requiring this process is to protect students' rights to an appropriate education. The HLS questions and the WIDA Screener are not used to determine legal status or for immigration purposes. They are also not used to determine grade level placement of students.

If you think your school made a mistake during this identification process, talk to your district's English Learner Coordinator. They may be able to apply for a "False EL Request" to fix mistake.

WIDA ACCESS for ELLs

Once a student is identified as an English learner, they must take a federally required summative test each year to measure their progress in English proficiency. The intent of this requirement is to ensure that the school district is meeting its obligation to provide an appropriate education.

Assessment scores are used to determine if a student is growing appropriately in the development of English language skills. If a student isn't progressing in learning the English language, schools should be asking "Why not?" Data from the summative test will help the school decide what they can do differently to ensure your child is receiving appropriate and effective instruction to be successful in all of their classes.

The testing window for the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs is open for seven weeks, in February and March of each year. You can find out more about the test by going to [WIDA's practice website](#). There you will find a test demonstration, sample items, and a test practice. However, students should not spend significant time studying and preparing for WIDA ACCESS for ELLs. The results are one piece of data used to help support the student's progress towards English proficiency.

When can my child stop taking this test?

A student identified as an English learner can only stop taking the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs when they have achieved an Overall proficiency score of 4.8 on the test. The state's criteria for when a student can stop taking the test can be found in the [Michigan Entrance and Exit Protocol](#).

Why is my child involved with this?

The federal laws are designed to protect students' rights to a free and appropriate education here in the United States. Additionally, school personnel are required to ensure every student is given equal access to a free and appropriate education.

The identification as an English learner helps schools appropriately support your child in their everyday classwork and provides additional support for them to develop their English skills. These supports are critical for students who are learning English. They can continue to learn from their teachers while they are improving their English language skills.

My child is doing well in their English language arts classes. What is the difference between English language arts (ELA) and English language proficiency?

The content area of ELA refers to what a student should know about the elements and structures of the English language. For example, Michigan's ELA standards call for students in grade 3 to be able to describe characters in a story (character traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how the characters' actions contribute to the sequence of events.

However, the content tested on the WIDA assessments relates to the student's proficiency in English—that is, their ability to listen, read, write, and speak in English across all educational content areas. For example, the WIDA English Language Development standards in the Language of Science call for students in grades 2-3 to be able to use language to construct scientific explanations that describe observations and/or data about a phenomenon. The WIDA assessments don't test students on their knowledge of content areas (in this example, their knowledge of science), but on their ability to use language to communicate information about those topics.

Under federal law, Michigan and the other states must offer two separate tests to assess students on their English language arts and on their English language proficiency.