



TO: District Superintendents
Superintendents of Public Schools
Superintendents of State-Operated and State-Supported Schools
Leaders of Religious, Independent, and Charter Schools
Principals of Schools Assessing English Language Proficiency
Directors of Regional Bilingual Education Resource Networks
Educators of English Language Learners

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SUBJECT: Joining the WIDA Consortium and New English Language Proficiency Assessments

DATE: October 8, 2025

WIDA Consortium

At the October 2025 meeting of the Board of Regents, New York State Education Department (“NYSED” or “the Department”) staff announced that New York will be joining the WIDA Consortium (<https://wida.wisc.edu/>). This consortium is a group of 42 states, territories, and federal agencies dedicated to the research, design, and implementation of a high-quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate system to support English Language Learners (ELLs) in K-12 contexts. WIDA is an educational services organization within the University of Wisconsin–Madison’s School of Education that advances academic language development and achievement for multilingual students. WIDA’s mission is to provide a trusted comprehensive approach to supporting, teaching, and assessing multilingual learners.

WIDA Assessments and Implementation

WIDA ACCESS is the collective name for WIDA’s suite of K-12 summative English language proficiency assessments. WIDA ACCESS is given annually to English learners in kindergarten through grade 12 in WIDA Consortium member states to monitor students’ progress in learning academic English. The WIDA ACCESS assessment is provided to

students in grades 1-12 via computer and to kindergarten students on paper. Paper forms are also available for students with disabilities who require this accommodation.

Students who are identified as ELLs with the most significant cognitive disabilities may be assessed with the WIDA Alternate ACCESS. This will deliver on a longtime initiative to have an appropriate assessment for alternately assessed ELLs with disabilities in New York. English as a New Language (ENL) and special education teachers have advocated for such an assessment for many years. The WIDA Alternate ACCESS is a paper-based test for all grade levels.

To further assist educators in the identification of students as ELLs, WIDA also provides a suite of assessments designed for newly enrolled students, including those with the most significant cognitive disabilities. These screeners are flexible, on-demand assessments that can be administered at any time during the school year. Like the ACCESS, WIDA screeners are delivered to the majority of students via computer, with paper-based tests for kindergarten students, students participating in the alternate assessment, and students with a disability requiring a paper-based test accommodation.

To provide time for training and professional learning, the first administration of the WIDA ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS will be in Spring 2027. The Screener assessments will be implemented in Fall 2027 following the first administration of the WIDA ACCESS. The final administration of the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) will be in Spring 2026. The New York State Identification Test for English Language Learners (NYSITELL) will continue to be offered until being replaced by the WIDA screener in Fall 2027.

Learning opportunities for all WIDA assessments will begin to be offered during the 2025–26 school year to ensure ample preparation time for educators and students. On demand assessment training resources will be available on a similar timeline. In the meantime, WIDA provides information on their assessments on their [website](#), under the “Assess” menu option and educators are encouraged to review this general information in advance of future training and resource sharing.

Instruction

One very important consideration in joining the WIDA Consortium was how the WIDA assessments align with instruction for ELLs in New York. This is because the WIDA assessments are developed from English language development standards that are directly connected to the linguistic demands of the academic content standards. The WIDA assessments measure a student’s ability to use and comprehend the language needed to have full and meaningful access to content area instruction.

This is the same core belief that permeates the [New York State Academic and Linguistic Demands \(ALDs\)](#). The ALDs provide a linguistic perspective from which teachers can examine the New York State Learning Standards, building their capacity to recognize the types of words, phrases, and structures present in the lessons they are planning that are necessary for ELLs to achieve grade-level success. To be completely clear: instruction for

our ELL students is not changing, only the tool measuring their progress is. The same instructional practices that lead to student success on the NYSESLAT will result in success on the WIDA ACCESS. Teachers providing instruction to ELLs must continue to follow the guidance of the ALDs and align their instruction with the New York State Next Generation Learning Standards in English Language Arts.

Support for Educators

During the 2025–26 school year, educators across New York will gain access to WIDA resources and professional learning opportunities to enhance teaching and assessing of K-12 multilingual learners. These include research-based publications and webinars that explore topics of interest to educators and families of multilingual learners. Professional learning opportunities are abundant and are delivered as self-paced modules, virtual workshops, and in-person and hybrid learning experiences.

WIDA will provide resources to further support English Language Learners and their teachers, including:

- access to WIDA technical assistance experts who support state-specific research and policy needs;
- WIDA’s Client Services Center to help educators across New York via email and phone, in coordination with NYSED;
- the WIDA Secure Portal, allowing New York educators access to online assessment training courses, test materials, and online professional learning; and
- research expertise from the top-ranked School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, WIDA’s home.

Beyond the support offered by WIDA, the Offices of Bilingual Education and World Languages, Special Education, and State Assessment will provide guidance and serve as resources to educators with any questions related to the instruction and assessment of ELLs, including those with significant cognitive disabilities. The Regional Bilingual Education Resource Networks (RBERNs) will continue to work in partnership with NYSED staff to provide technical assistance and professional development to districts focusing on instructional practices and improving educational outcomes. The RBERNs will be among the first groups trained on the WIDA assessments.

The Department will provide more information about the implementation of the WIDA assessments in the coming months. New York educators are encouraged to [sign up for the “WIDA in New York” email newsletter](#) to receive up-to-date information and resources.