

Memorandum

Date: April 17, 2009

To: WIDA Consortium LEA Members

Re: Kindergarten Proficiency Level Interpretation (2008-09)

The purpose of this memo is to communicate that unlike in the past, this year's Kindergarten score reports will report two proficiency level interpretations. The previous forms of the K-ACCESS were an adaptation of the ACCESS for ELLs[®] form used for grades 1–2, so like all the other grade levels, they reported one type of proficiency level score. However, because the prior version of K-ACCESS was written to assess standards developed for a K–2 grade level cluster, it did not target the specific linguistic and developmental needs of Kindergarten students. In particular, the Reading and Writing tasks assumed literacy skills beyond the level of many Kindergarten students and did not include many tasks assessing developmentally-appropriate pre-literacy skills that many Kindergarteners are in the process of acquiring.

In response to these and other related issues, the second edition of the *WIDA ELP Standards* (2007), separated Kindergarten from grades 1–2 and instead placed it within a PreK–K set of MPIs, which were used to write this new test. Now, for the first time, pre-literacy skills are represented in the standards and assessment. As with the previous K-ACCESS test forms, the test continues to be individually-administered and adaptive, but some additional features make it much more developmentally appropriate.

As in every other year, the score reports you will receive this year will contain scale scores, which allow raw test scores across grades to be compared on a single vertical scale from Kindergarten through Grade 12. From those scale scores, proficiency level scores are derived as *interpretations* of the scale scores in order to describe student performance in terms of the six WIDA ELP levels (1-Entering, 2-Beginning, 3-Developing, 4-Expanding, 5-Bridging, and 6-Reaching). However, unlike grades 1–12, **two proficiency level interpretations will be provided for K-ACCESS, one for accountability purposes and the other for instructional purposes.**

The **instructional proficiency levels, denoted by a prefix “K”** on the score report, can be used along with the WIDA ELP Standards or CAN DO Descriptors to help teachers create lessons geared toward and intended to advance a student's level of language proficiency (please visit www.wida.us to download the standards or CAN DO Descriptors). These scores indicate how students are doing *in Kindergarten*, but are not an accurate predictor of how they will perform in first grade and beyond.

Because the MPIs for the PreK–K cluster are more developmentally appropriate for Kindergarten students, they place less emphasis on true reading and writing, with more weight on pre-literacy skills. Since there is a lack of research on how well pre-literacy skills predict future performance in school, the instructional proficiency level scores established, particularly for Reading and Writing, are not adequate predictors of future academic success. If they were to be used as criteria for exit from support

services, this could lead to many Kindergarten students being placed out of English language support services without sufficient evidence that they are ready to continue building their literacy skills without such support.

For schools deciding where to place students in first grade, the important question is whether a student can be expected to succeed without English language support. This information is best gleaned from the **accountability proficiency level score**. This score mathematically accounts for the fact that K-ACCESS measures pre-literacy as well as early literacy, and therefore is lower to protect the ELL placement status of students who may appear to have high levels of English language proficiency according to the instructional scores, but who have yet to fully develop literacy skills, a process that may require support. The accountability scores will be a useful starting point for discussions between Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers about where students should be placed for the next school year or if they can be exited from ELL support at the end of Kindergarten.

In the figure below, the relationship between the accountability proficiency levels and the instructional proficiency levels is illustrated graphically for the domain of Writing. The accountability levels (PLs) are superimposed on the instructional levels, with a scale score range of 100–400. From this it can be seen that a student would have to be rated as a high K3 in order to place into accountability proficiency level 2. The instructional proficiency levels are based on interpretations of the new PreK–K standards, in which the first three levels describe pre-literacy writing skills such as tracing and copying, all of which are subsumed under proficiency level 1 in the grade level cluster 1–2 standards for the domain of Writing.

Writing Scores

Accountability PL	1		2	3	4	5	6	
Instructional PL	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5		K6	
Scale Score	100						400	

Important Points:

1. This year’s new format of Kindergarten ACCESS for ELLs® (K-ACCESS) required additional training and longer administration times, but the scores you will receive will be much more meaningful.
2. Having twice as many proficiency level scores for Kindergarteners means that educators will have twice as much information on which to base decisions at this crucial stage of development.
3. WIDA advises that test scores should never be used as the only criterion for high-stakes decision-making. Teacher judgment is the most significant indicator of when a student is ready to be exited from support services.

For more information, please refer to the *Interpretive Guide for Score Reports, 2009*, coming soon at www.wida.us.