

North Carolina ML/Title III Home Language Survey Process

This guidance document provides information based on federal and state requirements regarding the Home Language Survey (HLS). It helps ensure that HLS-established practices are compliant and standardized across the state to support the needs of North Carolina multilingual learners. Guidance in this document is based on this Federal law and State Policy:

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA), *public schools must ensure that EL students can participate meaningfully and equally in educational programs. EL programs must be reasonably calculated to enable EL students to attain English proficiency and meaningful participation in the standard educational program comparable to their never-EL peers."*

– Providing English Learners Equal Access to Curricular and Extracurricular Programs, EL Tool Kit, Chapter 4.

Policy TEST-011: Identification of English Learners Participation in Statewide Testing Program, Eligibility for Testing Accommodations and Exit Criteria

I. Identification and Annual Assessment of English Learners

A. To be identified as English Learners (ELs), students indicating more than one language on the standardized, statewide Home Language Survey (HLS) must have their language background and previous identification as an EL investigated by Public School Unit (PSU) staff with English language acquisition experience. If the student's background or previous identification indicates limited English proficiency, the state-adopted screener must be administered within 30 days of enrollment. Thereafter, all students identified as ELs must be annually assessed using the state-adopted EL proficiency assessment.

B. Students who move into North Carolina from another state or country and do not meet the North Carolina exit criteria on the WIDA ACCESS assessment or the WIDA Alternate ACCESS assessment must be administered the standardized, statewide Home Language Survey. If more than one language is indicated, their language background and previous identification as an EL must be investigated by PSU staff with English language acquisition experience. If the student's background or previous identification indicates limited English proficiency, the state-adopted screener must be administered within 30 days of enrollment.

KEY POINTS ([U.S ED EL Tool Kit, Chapter 1](#))([alternate source](#))

- PSUs must identify, in a timely manner, EL students in need of language assistance services.
- The home language survey (HLS) is the most common tool for identifying potential ELs. HLS is a questionnaire given to parents or guardians that helps schools identify which students are potential ELs. Students identified as potential ELs receive the English language proficiency (ELP) assessment to determine eligibility for language assistance services.
- An HLS must be administered effectively to ensure accurate results.

Step 1: Implement the Standardized Home Language Survey in ALL Student Enrollment

The home language survey (HLS) must be administered to all students upon enrollment. It is the first of three steps to determine whether a student is eligible to be identified as an English learner (EL) and is used solely to offer appropriate educational services (U.S. ED EL Toolkit, Chapter 1). Note: "Home" is defined as a student's current residence.

Standardized HLS Questions 1 through 3:

- 1) **What is the primary language used in the home, regardless of the language spoken by the student?**
 - a) This question is designed to determine the student's current level of exposure to a non-English language.
 - b) If a student has changed households within the past year — such as through adoption, foster care, or being an unaccompanied youth — questions about their home language may be more accurately answered based on their previous living situation. If the student's current parent or guardian is aware of the student's former language environment and believes it better represents the student's language background, they are encouraged to respond using that information. To ensure accuracy, please complete **Step 2** of this document, which includes conducting a **Parent Interview** and a **Records Review**.
- 2) **What is the language that the student first learned to speak?**
 - a) This question is designed to determine if the student primarily speaks English or if they primarily speak another language. The first language is sometimes called the 'native language' or 'mother tongue.'

For the purposes of EL identification, American Sign Language (ASL) is considered a Home language other than English. Please refer to Question 8 in this document.

For any student reporting more than one dominant language, clarifying information should be obtained during a parent interview to determine screening.

3) What is the language most often spoken by the student?

- a) Questions 1 and 3 are very similar, yet the answers yield different paths through the HLS. The phrase "most often" reflects how much time a student spends outside the PK-12 school setting. It highlights the importance of the student's daily, consistent exposure to a language other than English. If a student has multiple homes, estimate the time spent in English and non-English environments. If the non-English exposure is close to or exceeds half of the time, this should be considered when determining if a student should be screened.

The following questions are part of the enrollment process in the Student Information System (SIS), but they are not included in the Home Language Survey (HLS) section of the online enrollment form. These questions have been added to the [paper version of the HLS](#) for your reference and completion. (Translated HLS)

4) Has your student ever attended school in the United States?

If yes, how many years?

In what state?

5) If your student has attended another North Carolina school, please share which school district.

The HLS should only be administered the first time a student enrolls in an NC school. If a student moves schools or districts within NC and completes an additional home language survey at registration, ***the answers on the original home language survey will prevail to determine EL Status.***

Students who move to North Carolina from another state or country and do not meet the North Carolina exit criteria on the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs assessment or the WIDA Alternate ACCESS assessment must be administered the standardized, statewide Home Language Survey. If

more than one language is indicated, PSU staff with English language acquisition experience must investigate the student's language background and previous identification as an EL.

When students transfer to a North Carolina school with scores from a WIDA Consortium member state, the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten, WIDA Screener, and ACCESS for ELLs scores *can* be used for determining EL status by applying the North Carolina criteria for identification and exit. A list of participating states can be found on the [WIDA Consortium's home page](#) (under Members/States Pages). When a student enrolls in a school from a WIDA Consortium member state, the school has up to thirty calendar days from enrollment to obtain the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten, WIDA Screener, and ACCESS for ELLs test scores from the member state. If the scores are less than one year old, they may be used to make EL identification and placement decisions. Suppose the receiving school does not receive the scores within the timeline. In that case, a certified test administrator must administer either the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten or the WIDA Screener to determine EL identification and eligibility for ESL services. If scores are received and are over a year old, schools should investigate the need for an Instructional Update using the appropriate WIDA Screener. If the student previously attended a North Carolina public school, the EL identification from the most recent North Carolina enrollment still applies. Each student identified as an EL must be assessed annually. Students who transfer to North Carolina during the test window must be assessed even if they have taken the ACCESS for ELLs in another state during the current school year.

Additional HLS Considerations:

When the Home Language Survey (HLS) is given to students enrolled below Kindergarten:

Identifying students for ELD services in NC requires a specific WIDA screener, which is only valid for students enrolling in grades K-12. Responses to the HLS completed for enrollment below Kindergarten are used to indicate potential EL status when the student enters Kindergarten. It is important to record the original HLS responses in the PSU's Student Information System (SIS) or the student's educational record. PSUs can determine EL status for students in Pre-K as recommended in the guidance document [Best Practices for Pre-K ML Identification](#).

Federal law mandates that the Home Language Survey (HLS) be provided in a language comprehensible to the student's parents/guardians (for more details, refer to [Chapter](#)

[10—Parental Engagement and Support \[archived\]](#)). While the HLS can be administered through paper or adaptive online forms, **it is considered best practice for staff to assist in its completion, either partially or entirely.** It should be seamlessly integrated into the regular enrollment procedure and filled out concurrently with the other enrollment documents.

All staff involved in enrolling students must be familiar with these HLS implementation protocols, and it is the district's responsibility to ensure that they understand their legal requirements for identifying ELs. School staff and written school documentation should inform parents that the HLS is administered to all newly enrolled students, is used solely to determine appropriate educational services, and is not used to determine legal status or immigration purposes.

Parent/Guardian signatures must be obtained electronically or on paper during the HLS administration. This serves as evidence a parent/guardian has been briefed on the EL determination process. If PSUs opt for online HLS administration, the standardized home language survey questions are included in Infinite Ca

On rare occasions, there may be a misunderstanding about the purpose of the HLS, or the parents or guardians may misunderstand the questions. In these cases, they may complete the Home Language Survey again. Keep both copies of the HLS on file in the student's academic record, explaining the re-administration

Step 2: Conduct a Parent Interview and Records Review

Some newly enrolled students can be screened without a parent interview or records review, as it is clear that they have minimal English proficiency and no exposure to any academic education in English.

Other students may have a multilingual background and will require further investigation. Conducting a parent interview is part of Test-011 and should be conducted by PSU staff with English language acquisition experience. If the student's background or previous identification indicates limited English proficiency, the state-adopted screener must be administered within 30 days of enrollment.

- When talking to the parent/family caregiver, consider clarifying information like:
 - If your student is beyond kindergarten, what instructional language was used in previous schools?

- What language(s) does your child primarily use to watch television, on the computer, etc.?
- Additional Questions are available in the [ML/Title III Repository](#)
- Review available documents (e.g., school records)
- Look at MTSS protocols (multiple moves, family backgrounds, academic performance, etc.)
- The student has a first language other than English, has never been identified as an English learner, and has attended K–12 English-language U.S. schools for over three consecutive years, meeting grade-level expectations.
- The student was identified as an English language learner but has exited the ACCESS for ELLs annual assessment with the North Carolina 4.5 Exit criteria recorded in the Student Information System (SIS) and documentation in the student's cumulative record.

Step 3: Recording the HLS in the Student Information System

The HLS information and determination to screen a student are recorded in the Home Language Survey fields in the SIS. For further information on recording the HLS accurately in SIS, please refer to the Multilingual Learner Virtual Repository.

View [Reference Slides: ML Data in Infinite Campus](#) (slides 8-15) to view the steps for recording the HLS, as well as for . For further information, please contact susan.walz@dpi.nc.gov.

Step 4: Testing for EL Identification

When the HLS indicates that a student new to the state is exposed to languages other than English at home, PSUs must administer the NC State Board of Education-approved screening tools, the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten or the WIDA Screener. The test must be administered within 30 days of enrollment by a WIDA-trained test administrator. The grade level and semester determine the appropriate screening tool:

- Grade K students who enroll in semester 1 are assessed in only the Listening and Speaking domains.
- Grade K students who enroll in semester 2 and Grade 1 students who enroll in semester 1 will be assessed in all four domains of the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten.

- **Students retained in grades K, 1, 2, 4, 6, or 9 are considered “semester 2” students.** Therefore, when a student is repeating one of these grades, the grade span should be coded and conducted as semester 2, even though it occurs during the semester 1 timeframe.
- Students who exited EL identification or were never identified as EL may be reassessed with the WIDA Screener for **Re-identification** purposes. The Re-identification process may occur at any time throughout the year but must include documented reasons for proceeding with rescreening. Please consult the [ML/Title III Monitoring Former English Learners Protocol](#) for more information.
- Students already identified as EL but with no WIDA Screener or ACCESS for ELLs test results from the current or previous school year should be assessed with the WIDA Screener as an **EL Update to Services**.
- Students can only be assessed once per academic school year using the Screener.

For the 25-56 School Year (As reflected in [NC State Board Policy Test 0-11](#))

North Carolina Identification Criteria for WIDA Screeners

WIDA Screener for Kindergarten			
GRADE	DOMAINS	QUALIFIES FOR SERVICE	DOES NOT QUALIFY FOR SERVICE
Kindergarten (1 st Semester)	Listening and Speaking (L/S)	Oral Language composite score below 4.5	Oral Language composite score of 4.5 or higher
Kindergarten (2 nd Semester) and Grade 1 (1 st Semester)	Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing	Overall composite score below 4.5	Overall composite score of 4.5 or higher
WIDA Screener			
Grade 1 (2 nd Semester) and Grades 2–12	Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing	Overall composite score below 4.5	Overall composite score of 4.5 or higher
WIDA Alternate Screener			
WIDA ALTERNATE Screener	Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing	Overall composite score < 3* (less than 3)	Overall Composite score 3 or higher (≥ 3)

**If a student receives a score that is less than a proficiency level (PL) 3, the score report will note "<3."*

Please consult the [North Carolina State Specific Guidance for WIDA™ ASSESSMENTS](#) for additional information on these WIDA Assessments.

Step 5: Create Records in the Student Information System Used by the PSU

Once a student is screened, scores must be entered in the student record in the SIS, which is the authoritative source for EL status information.

There are two outcomes for any WIDA Screener:

- A student who was screened and did not qualify for services is **Not EL**
- A student who was screened and qualified for services is current **EL**

Step 6: Parental/Family Caregiver Notification

Under Title I, Parental Notification Requirements, a school using funds under Title I Part A, Sec. 112(d)(3)(A) or Title III must notify parents/family caregivers of screening outcomes no later than 30 days after the beginning of the school year.

If a student is identified as an English Learner (EL), parent notification, in the parent's or family caregiver's native language to the extent practicable, must inform the parent(s) or family caregiver that their child has been identified for participation in a language instruction educational program. If a child has not been identified as an EL before the beginning of the school year, the parents must be notified within two weeks of the child's placement in a language instruction educational program.

The notification must include the following information:

- Why the child was identified as an EL and why the child needs to be placed in a language instructional education program that will assist the child in developing and attaining English proficiency and meeting state standards;
- The child's level of English proficiency, how such level was assessed, and the child's academic level;
- The method of instruction that will be used to serve the child, including a description of other methods of instruction available and how those methods differ in content, instructional goals, and the use of English and a native language, if applicable;
- How the program will meet the specific needs of the child in attaining English and meeting state standards;
- The program's exit requirements, the expected rate of transition into a classroom not tailored for ELLs, and, in the case of high school students, the expected rate of graduation;
- How the instructional program will meet the objectives of an individualized education program for a child with a disability and
- Written guidance on the rights that parents/caregivers have to remove their child from a program upon their request or to choose another program or method of instruction, if available, and how parents will be provided assistance in selecting the best program to serve their child.
- All EL students must participate in the ELP annual assessment even if the parent/family caregiver refuses EL service(s)

Special Note: Identifying Students with Disabilities for Language Services

Communication and collaboration between the ESL stakeholders and EC teachers/case managers should ensure appropriate measures are in place when screening students with documented evidence of learning disabilities. If accommodations for Screeners are not yet in place in an IEP, this team should review any available accommodation reports or school records when considering screening.

Additional Information

HLS Checklist

- Completed for every student during initial enrollment in school
- Completed ONE time per student enrolling in the PSU
- Translated or interpreted (as appropriate) into a language understood by parents
- Signed (electronically or on paper) and dated by the parent or guardian
- Captured results within the student's educational record

WIDA Screening Checklist

Contact ESLTitleIII@dpi.nc.gov if you have questions about the following:

1. Entrance & Exit Protocol
2. Title III funding
3. Title III compliance and monitoring
4. Professional Development
5. ESL Program Quality/NC ELD Standards
6. EL data in the SIS

Contact WIDA if you have questions about:

Client Services Center (WIDA Consortium) 1-866-276-7735 Questions about:

- General WIDA information about assessments
- How do you navigate the WIDA Secure Portal for training, materials, etc.?

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Does the HLS need to be completed every year?** A home language survey needs to be completed only during the first year of enrollment in any NC PSU. Answers to the home language survey are kept in student records in the SIS. If a student moves to another PSU, it is important to notify the receiving PSU of the student's EL status.
2. **What do I do if I can't find or don't have access to a transfer student's HLS?** (Check if the student record has been transferred in the SIS.) Our recommendation is to begin by contacting the student's sending PSU (Public School Unit). If the PSU does not provide the HLS (Home Language Survey), you may ask the parents/guardians to complete it again. However, please note that the absence of the HLS or a duplicate request from the parents/guardians will not affect the student's EL (English Learner) status if they were first identified as EL in North Carolina, even if they indicate "English" on the new form. The sending school (PSU) has already determined that the student requires EL services.
3. **What do I do if I accidentally label a student as EL?** If you accidentally identify a student as an English Learner in your SIS, please email Susan Walz at susan.walz@dpi.nc.gov as soon as possible. Any student identified as an English Learner in the SIS will be included in the headcount and expected to participate in the ACCESS testing window.
4. **When can I screen a student for ESL services?** Students can be screened at any time throughout the school year, but **only once** per academic year.
5. **Who can administer the WIDA Screener?** Please follow all policies and procedures in the [North Carolina State Specific Guidance for WIDA Assessments](#).
6. **How many times can a student be screened?** Ideally, a student will only be screened one time. There are circumstances where a student may be screened again, including a **Reidentification** when:
 - a) A student was screened and did not qualify for services.
 - b) It is determined through documentation and parents and school leadership approval that a student Exited early and may need additional support

An **Instructional Update** can also be given to a student when:

- a) For students who have left and returned to the country, it is possible that a PSU may want to re-screen the students for an instructional update
- b) A student has not received an annual assessment for more than two academic school years. This often occurs when a student is identified as EL in North Carolina, moves to a non-WIDA state, and returns to NC. The student is still considered EL when he or she returns to NC.

7. Where are the Test Administrator Manuals for the WIDA Screeners? The Test Administrator manuals are in the WIDA Secure Portal. You will need a WIDA account to access this test training.

8. Do we screen students who report American Sign Language as their language? It is difficult to speak in generalities about students who report American Sign Language on their HLS. Please work with the student's parents or family caregivers and EC experts in your PSU to determine screening. If you need any additional information, email ESLTitleIII@dpi.nc.gov.

Student Language	Home Language	Eligible for WIDA Screening?
American Sign Language	English	No
American Sign Language	Language other than English	Yes - based on information gleaned from the parent/family caregiver interview and student records.

9. How are the WIDA Screeners scored? As of July 1, 2022, North Carolina will use the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten for Kindergarteners and 1st-semester 1st graders during the 2022-22 school year.

- Visit the [WIDA Screener for Kinder Score Calculator](#) to score the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten. As you screen a student, record scores directly on the score sheets. The score sheets are detailed and tell you when to continue giving the student more challenging prompts within a screener section and when to go on to the next section. These guidelines are carefully calculated and strategically placed to ensure the screening gathers enough information to indicate a

student's proficiency level without requiring students to attempt numerous items and tasks beyond their current language abilities.

- Paper/pencil tests: The WIDA Screener paper/pencil tests are scored by the test administrator after the assessment has been completed
- Online tests: The Listening and Reading domains are scored automatically when the WIDA Screener assessments are taken online. A certified test administrator scores speaking and writing tests.
- Whenever you are asked to score locally, please use the WIDA Rubrics or Examples in the training materials.
- Visit [Which Screener Should I Use?](#) for additional information.

10. **Can private schools screen students using the appropriate WIDA Screener?** Yes. Please email [Marshall Foster](#) if you have any additional questions.

11. **Can students with disabilities be screened and qualify for EL services?** Yes. If their Home Language Survey indicates they should be, all students, including those with disabilities, must be screened.

12. **How do I decide who should take the WIDA Screener Paper test instead of the Online test?** The required testing mode for the WIDA Screener in NC is online. However, suppose students cannot access the online assessment because of a documented disability or are unfamiliar with using a computer. If this is documented in the current Individualized Education Program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan, the paper/pencil mode may be provided. Public school unit TCs should contact their RAC to secure paper materials in such cases.

13. **Should students who move in from another PSU but already have screener scores be screened again?** If a student moves in from another PSU in North Carolina and already has screener scores, they need not be re-screened. The scores should be in the Student Information System, and the EL record can be transferred following the transfer record directions.

14. **If a student moves from another non-WIDA state, must they be screened here?** Yes. All new enrolling students without K-12 experience in North Carolina public schools must be screened if the Home Language Survey and investigation reflect a home language other than English.

15. **If a student moves from another state that uses WIDA, do they need to be screened here?** If the student has been screened using either the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten or a WIDA Screener in another state within 30 calendar days of enrollment, the district can use the scores IF they have a record. Please note that neither DPI, WIDA, nor DRC can provide these scores to educators. The sending district must provide them. Once a copy of these scores has been obtained, scores must be entered into the PSU's SIS to determine the student's EL status.
16. **Can I screen a Pre-K student using the WIDA Screener?** WIDA does not produce a screener that has been validated for assessing the English proficiency of students younger than Kindergarten. Identifying Pre-K students as EL is determined locally. If PSUs want to add Pre-K students to the EL headcount, the NCDPI ML/Title III Team suggests following a process similar to K-12 EL identification. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction expects that any student identified as EL in Pre-K and included in your EL headcount will be screened for ESL Services in Kindergarten. Additional information is in the [Best Practices for Pre-K ML Identification](#) guidance document.
17. **Can Title III money be used for screeners?** No. Title III money cannot be used for any activities related to administering or scoring the WIDA Screener for Kindergarten or the WIDA Screener. This includes attending training for the assessment or hiring substitute teachers to free up educators to administer the assessment. If you have further questions regarding how PSUs can use Title III money, contact Marshall Foster at marshall.foster@dpi.nc.gov