

Article

Language Standards Frameworks and Language Assessment: A Codependent Relationship

Margo Gottlieb*

University of Wisconsin-Madison, U.S.A

Mark Chapman

University of Wisconsin-Madison, U.S.A

Received: 15 September 2021/Accepted: 31 January 2022/Published: 30 March 2022

Abstract

The last two decades have witnessed language standards frameworks serving as guidance and the metric for the design and enactment of large-scale language assessment. In the United States (U.S.), federal legislation has also been a driving force in dictating the parameters for such an alliance. This article provides an illustrative example of how the thinking of a consortium of U.S. states, territories, and federal agencies has evolved in its conceptualization of language standards frameworks, working in tandem with the development of language assessment to ensure robust alignment between the two. Theoretical and historical foundations underpin the discussion while the components of the language frameworks with their close relation to language assessment are presented to substantiate validity claims between standards frameworks and assessment.

Keywords

Language standards frameworks, language proficiency assessment, multilingual learners

1 The Role of Language Standards in Language Assessment of Multilingual Learners

Since the onset of the millennium, language standards have played a prominent role in the education of multilingual learners. Although we recognize the worldwide contribution of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*, launched and enacted during the same time frame, we highlight the role of language standards in assessment practices within the context of the United States (U.S.). Foundational for educational practice through curriculum, instruction, and classroom assessment, language standards are also envisioned in policy circles as the anchor and metric for annual large-scale language proficiency assessment.

This article relates the interconnections between language standards frameworks and language proficiency assessments designed for students identified as English learners, the subset of multilingual learners who are eligible for language support services in kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) in

*Corresponding author. Email: margo.gottlieb@wisc.edu

U.S. public schools. High-stakes decisions for individual students are predicated on these standards-referenced assessment results. Additionally, scores from these assessments are directly tied to state and local accountability as well as contribute to compliance of federal mandates. To illustrate the nature of this evolving relationship between standards frameworks and language proficiency assessment, we look to the WIDA consortium of 41 states, territories, and federal agencies along with their 500 international schools.

In the United States, the presence of standards and annual assessment can be traced to the federally ratified Elementary and Secondary School Act. Originally envisioned in 1965 as a cornerstone of the Civil Rights' 'War on Poverty', this law represents a landmark commitment to equal access to quality education for underserved student populations. However, 35 years elapsed before multilingual learners (at the time labeled 'Limited English Proficient' students) were actually treated as a recognized protected class and considered in state assessment systems.

As illustrated in Table 1, standards and assessment have been integral to the fabric of teaching and learning in public education settings in the United States and its territories since 1994. The most recent 2015 iteration (*Every Student Succeeds Act*) includes provisions that explicitly require an association between language standards and academic content standards in language proficiency assessment; namely, critical element (1.2) requires 'coherent and progressive English language proficiency standards that correspond to the state's academic standards'.

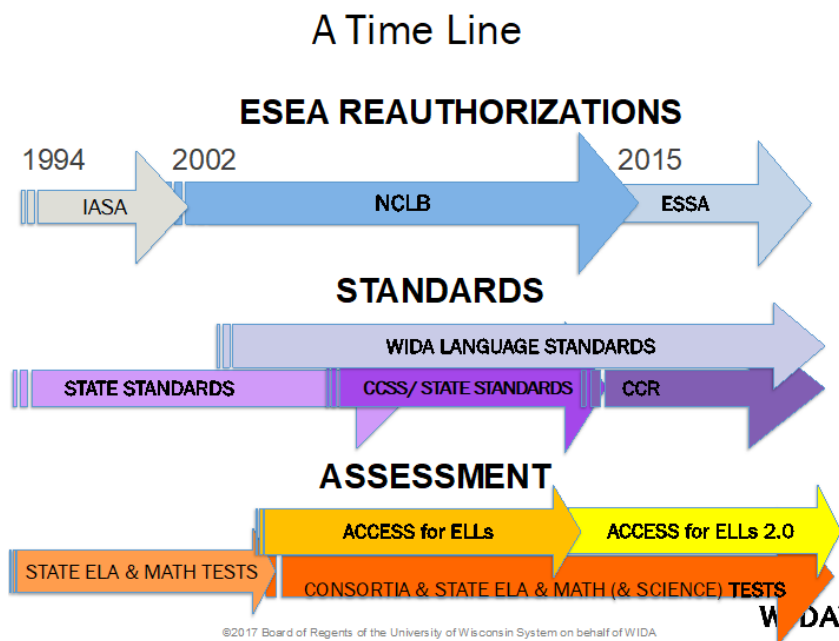
Table 1

Language Proficiency Standards and Assessment: A U.S. National Mandate

Federal Legislation: Reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) of 1965	Year	Applicable Standards	Provisions for Assessing English Language Proficiency
<i>Improving America's School Act</i> (IASA)	1994	State academic standards for Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics	State assessment systems are formalized without mention of English language proficiency standards nor assessment
<i>No Child Left Behind</i> (NCLB)	2002	State academic standards for Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics grades 3-12, and English language proficiency standards, grades K-12; Science added in 2008	Annual English language proficiency testing required of 'Limited English proficient' students is grounded in state or consortium English language proficiency/ development standards aligned to state content standards
<i>Every Student Succeeds Act</i> (ESSA)	2015	State academic standards for Reading/Language Arts, Mathematics, & Science, grades 3-12, and English language proficiency standards, grades K-12	Identical requirements as NCLB, plus uniform statewide procedures for entrance (identification) and exit (reclassification) in language education programs commensurate with 'English learner' status

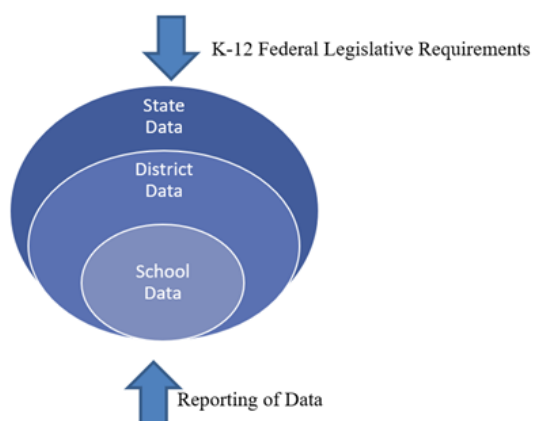
Putting the time frame on a horizontal plane, Figure 1 depicts the relationship among educational initiatives sparked by federal legislation (ESEA reauthorizations) and their manifestation in standards and assessment. Individual states had much latitude in their use or non-use of language proficiency standards and assessment until 2002 when requirements became codified nationally. The juxtaposition among language standards, content standards, and related assessments in legislation since that time, in one sense, has pushed states to begin to understand both the parallelism between and the interaction of language and content in the education of multilingual learners.

Figure 1
The Juxtaposition of Federal Legislation, Standards, and Assessment



Education has always been a state’s right in the United States; however, national policy is the vehicle for accountability that requires states to comply or be denied educational funding. This top-down hierarchical structure, shown in the nested Figure 2, illustrates the movement and influence of large-scale assessment data through the educational system, from the federal level to states, to districts or counties, and finally, to schools. Large-scale assessment of achievement and language proficiency on which these data are predicated occurs on an annual basis with individual states having the prerogative of selecting their testing windows and in reporting the results.

Figure 2
The Flow of Large-Scale Assessment Data for Accountability Purposes in the United States



As federal regulation dictates a strong correlate or ‘alignment’ between standards and assessment, one of the roles of standards is to drive large-scale test design and development. Subsequently, for test developers and educators of multilingual learners, there must be direct links between language policy and assessment practice as well as between language development standards and language proficiency assessment. The greater the flow and consistency of information among the levels in an educational

ecosystem, the more cohesive is its assessment system and the potential sharing and interpretation of information among stakeholder groups.

2 The History of WIDA and its Language Standards Frameworks

The launch of WIDA coincided with the era of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation in 2002, with the awarding of the first U.S. Department of Education's Enhanced Assessment Grant to consortia of states committed to the creation and enactment of English language proficiency standards and assessment in public elementary and secondary schools. Remaining steadfast to its mission to 'advance academic language development and academic achievement for children and youth who are culturally and linguistically diverse through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional learning for educators', over the years, WIDA has enhanced its conceptualization of standards frameworks to embrace recent shifts in the field of language education as well as in educational and linguistic theory, policy, and practice. Concomitantly, its hallmark secure standards-referenced English language proficiency (ELP) assessment, ACCESS for ELLs (hereafter ACCESS) administered in K-12 settings across the United States, has expanded to a suite of related English language proficiency tools that are available worldwide.

WIDA's mantra and one of its core values has always been its Can Do Philosophy. This stance has spurred an assets-based commitment to the education of multilingual learners that is infused into all its products and services, in particular, language standards frameworks and accompanying assessments. Simply stated, WIDA recognizes, builds on, and leverages the strengths, contributions, and potential of multilingual learners. Its positionality as a leader in the field of language education has been influential in negating a deficit mindset that historically has viewed multilingual learners as a 'problem' in need of 'fixing'.

WIDA's *English language proficiency standards for English language learners in Kindergarten through grade 12*, its first edition published in 2004, sets forth frameworks for large-scale state and classroom assessment. As stated, 'the primary thrust of the framework for large-scale state assessment is to identify the range of model performance indicators that will be used to generate the specifications for the English language proficiency test as well as the anchors for the measure itself' (Gottlieb, 2004, p.1). Model performance indicators, portrayed in WIDA language standards frameworks through 2019, are presented as representative samples of different levels of English language proficiency that consist of a.) a function (*why* students use language), b.) content (*what* topic to address), and c.) modality (*how* to support language and maximize student access to meaning- e.g., orally, visually, graphically). Strands of model performance indicators form developmental continua across the levels of English language proficiency, such as the one shown in Table 5.

This inaugural language standards framework became the grounding for the conceptualization of ACCESS which was first administered in 2005. In particular, the document's division into grade-level clusters, language domains, and language proficiency levels were mirrored in the initial assessment. Throughout the years, WIDA has consistently envisioned its language standards frameworks as instructional and assessment tools and a key component of its assessment system (WIDA, 2007). The strong collaborative partnership between WIDA and the Center for Applied Linguistics in the development of ACCESS over the past two decades has been indispensable in fostering and maintaining the close alignment between the language standards frameworks and language proficiency assessment.

The original five broad standards statements, shown in Table 2, crafted by a group of educators and test developers across WIDA states, have remained intact over time. As is evident by the statements and as a core value, WIDA has always envisioned language through a content lens and this relationship has grown closer over time. Standard 1, language for social and instructional purposes, (described in the discussion of the 2020 edition) interacts with the other content-driven standards while it also accentuates the interests and perspectives of multilingual learners.

Table 2

The WIDA English Language Development Standards Statements

English Language Development Standard 1	English language learners communicate for Social and Instructional purposes within the school setting
English Language Development Standard 2	English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Language Arts
English Language Development Standard 3	English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Mathematics
English Language Development Standard 4	English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Science
English Language Development Standard 5	English language learners communicate information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of Social Studies

3 Examining the 2012 Standards Framework

To date, there have been four editions of WIDA language standards frameworks: 2004, 2007, 2012, and 2020. The design of ACCESS described in this chapter is based, in large part, on the 2012 standards edition and its language development framework, depicted in Figure 3. In the last section we outline the most recent 2020 edition and note its potential influence on ACCESS.

Figure 3

The Language Standards Framework Corresponding with the 2012 Edition

In this standards framework, the outermost circle, Guiding Principles of Language Development Exemplifying the WIDA Can Do Philosophy, undergirds the consortium's vision. Moving inward, Developmentally Appropriate Academic Language in Sociocultural Contexts, refers to the treatment of three dimensions of language- discourse, sentence, and word/phrase- relevant for each age group (or grade-level cluster). The innermost circle focuses on the primary elements of the language standards that are adopted in ACCESS (Performance Definitions, Standards and their Matrices) and the reporting of results (Can Do Descriptors).

The language standards and their matrices, the intersection of strands of Model Performance Indicators and the four language domains-listening, speaking, reading, and writing- spread across grade-

level clusters (see Table 5 for an example strand). Five language proficiency levels form a continuum across each strand of Model Performance Indicators (consisting of a language function, an example topic, and support). Performance Definitions describe the holistic features of each language proficiency level across the K-12 spectrum and have served as the bases for developing the Speaking and Writing interpretive rubrics for ACCESS.

In the next section we offer an illustrative example of the operationalization of language standards in large-scale language assessment practices. It traces the transformation of WIDA English language development standards, as presented in the 2012 edition, into ACCESS, its large-scale English language proficiency test. Throughout the test development process, we note the close ties between the standards framework and the assessment.

4 The WIDA English Language Development Standards as Anchors for its English Language Proficiency Assessments

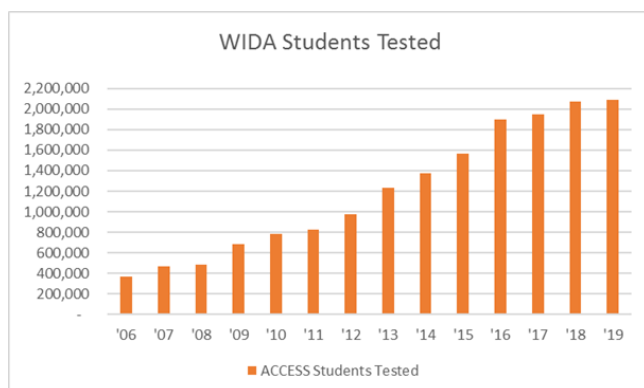
WIDA produces a range of English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessments that are all grounded in the WIDA English Language Standards documents. These assessments include WIDA Screener, used to formally identify students in grades K-12 in U.S. public schools as English learners (ELs), and WIDA MODEL used in international schools to support admissions decisions and annual progress monitoring. This article focuses on WIDA's primary ELP assessment, ACCESS, whose scores are used to monitor and report students progress in acquiring academic English. ACCESS test scores serve as documentation for ELs' annual English language proficiency progress, a federal requirement, and to determine when students have reached proficiency in academic English. These target scores are determined independently by each state in the consortium.

As mentioned earlier, the WIDA ELD Standards frameworks have undergone a series of iterations. On the same timeline, the WIDA Consortium has grown in terms of numbers of member states and the numbers of students taking the ACCESS test has also increased steadily. The graph in Figure 4 indicates growth in numbers of students taking ACCESS from 2006 to 2019 across grades K-12. Recently, more than two million ELs across forty U.S. states and territories take ACCESS annually, with the highest numbers of students in grades K-2.

One key milestone in the history of the assessment was the launch of the online version of ACCESS in 2015, when the rigor of the assessment was increased to reflect the language demands of the Common Core Standards (2010) which became the impetus for a new generation of state academic content standards. Since then, ACCESS has been available in both paper and online modes, with states being responsible for deciding which mode to administer.

Figure 4

Trends in Numbers of Students Tested on ACCESS for ELLs



5 Language Standards as the Building Block for Language Assessments

ACCESS aims to operationalize the WIDA ELD Standards. These standards describe the academic language expectations for ELs within a particular context at six different grade level clusters and in five content areas. The grade-level clusters of the current ACCESS test forms are parallel to those of the standards, namely, K, 1, 2–3, 4–5, 6–8, and 9–12. However, previous iterations of ACCESS, as the ELD standards, were structured differently in the elementary grades, with K-2 and 3-5 being the configurations for younger students. Several years of ACCESS data provided clear evidence that students in Kindergarten and Grade 1 performed consistently and significantly different from students in Grades 2 and 3. Influenced by this evidence from the assessment data, WIDA made a shift in not only the structure of the assessment but also in the representation of the same grade spans in its ELD Standards.

The language proficiency levels are embedded in the WIDA ELD Standards in the form of Performance Definitions. The Performance Definitions (see Table 3) describe the stages of language development, providing details about the language that students can comprehend and produce at each proficiency level. The Performance Definitions are based on three criteria: (a) vocabulary usage at the word/phrase level; (b) language forms and conventions at the sentence level; and (c) linguistic complexity at the discourse level. Vocabulary usage refers to students’ increasing comprehension and production of the technical language required for success in the academic content areas. Language forms and conventions refers to the increasing development of phonological, syntactic, and semantic understanding in receptive skills or control of usage in productive language skills. Linguistic complexity refers to students’ demonstration of oral interaction or writing of increasing quantity and variety.

Table 3
Speaking and Writing Performance Definitions

WIDA Performance Definitions - Speaking and Writing Grades K-12

Within sociocultural contexts for language use...			
Discourse Dimension		Sentence Dimension	Word/Phrase Dimension
Linguistic Complexity		Language Forms and Conventions	Vocabulary Usage
Level 6 - Reaching Language that meets all criteria through Level 5, Bridging			
At each grade, toward the end of a given level of English language proficiency, and with instructional support, English language learners will produce...			
Level 5 Bridging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple, complex sentences Organized, cohesive, and coherent expression of ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of grammatical structures matched to purpose A broad range of sentence patterns characteristic of particular content areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical and abstract content-area language, including content-specific collocations Words and expressions with precise meaning across content areas
Level 4 Expanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short, expanded, and some complex sentences Organized expression of ideas with emerging cohesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of grammatical structures Sentence patterns characteristic of particular content areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific and some technical content-area language Words and expressions with expressive meaning through use of collocations and idioms across content areas
Level 3 Developing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short and some expanded sentences with emerging complexity Expanded expression of one idea or emerging expression of multiple related ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Repetitive grammatical structures with occasional variation Sentence patterns across content areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific content language, including cognates and expressions Words or expressions with multiple meanings used across content areas
Level 2 Emerging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phrases or short sentences Emerging expression of ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulaic grammatical structures Repetitive phrasal and sentence patterns across content areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General content words and expressions Social and instructional words and expressions across content areas
Level 1 Entering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Words, phrases, or chunks of language Single words used to represent ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phrase-level grammatical structures Phrasal patterns associated with common social and instructional situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General content-related words Everyday social, instructional and some content-related words

In addition to the Speaking and Writing Performance Definitions, which serve as the foundational resource for the ACCESS Speaking and Writing Rubrics, there is an additional set of Performance Definitions for the receptive language domains of listening and reading.

ACCESS incorporates items assessing students' academic language development from each of the five standards with test items written to specifications that address the Performance Definitions across the six language proficiency levels. Ideas for test items are generated by experienced classroom educators. For example, for ELD Standard 4, Reading test items for the grades 4-5 test will be proposed by teachers working with students in those grades who are familiar with the themes and topics covered by the science curriculum. These ideas are developed into prototype test items by professional item writers and the prototypes are then reviewed by another group of educators who are also familiar with the relevant grade and content area. Thus, test content is developed collaboratively between experienced classroom educators who know the content expectations of the classroom and professional item writers who can interpret the WIDA ELD Standards and associated test item specifications.

Every selected response item and every performance-based task on ACCESS targets at least one of the five Standards. In the cases of some test items and tasks, the Standards are combined as follows:

- Social and Instructional Language
- Language of Language Arts
- Language of Math
- Language of Science
- Language of Social Studies
 - o Integrated Language of Math and Language of Science
 - o Integrated Language of Language Arts and Language of Social Studies

Test developers use documents known as test item specifications to delineate how particular test items will operationalize aspects of the Standards. Table 4 shows part of such an item specification for a Speaking task in Grades 4-5. The targeted Standards are integrated Language of Language Arts and Language of Social Studies. The targeted Key Language Use or purpose is Recount, and specific tasks are developed to target language proficiency levels 1, 3, and 5. The item specification also provides greater levels of detail to test developers about specific item demands via the Model Performance Indicators for both Language of Language Arts and Language of Social Studies.

These instructions to test developers, drawn directly from the WIDA ELD Standards, provide the links between standards and assessments. The item specifications codify these relationships and allow the assessment to be directly related to the standards at the most discrete level of test design; that of the individual test item.

Table 4

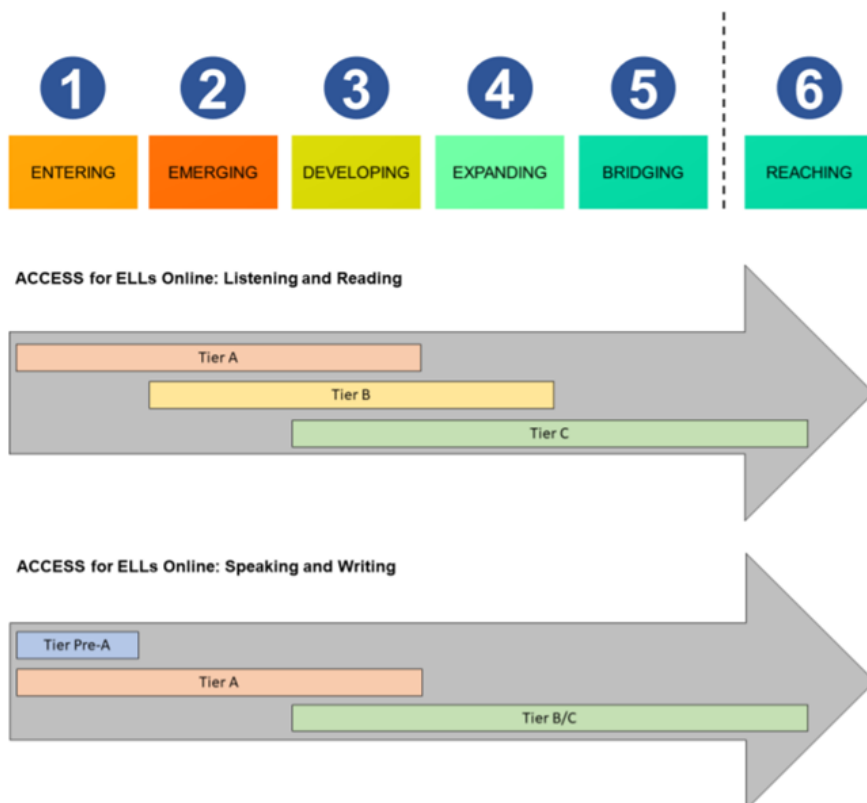
ACCESS for ELLs Speaking Test Item Specification Crafted from the ELD Standards Document

Spec Title	Language Domain	Grade Level	Tier	Standard	Item Format	Key Use	Topic	Proficiency Range
S45_LS	Speaking	4-5	All	LS	Constructed Response	Recount	Inventors	1, 3, 5
Purpose								
The computer-administered Speaking Test allows ELLs in grades 4-5 to demonstrate their English language proficiency through speaking about inventors using language used in language arts/social studies.								
Model Performance Indicators								
P1	LA: Name characters, settings, or objects depicted in illustrated stories SS: Identify inventors or inventions that contributed to the advancement of society							
P3	LA: Summarize storylines, issues, or conflicts by providing details of people, events, objects, or situations in various genres SS: State reasons for inventions							
P5	LA: Propose options or solutions to issues in various genres and support responses in detail SS: Explain, with details, contributions of inventors to history							
Key academic language use: RECOUNT. Tasks are designed to elicit student responses characteristic of recount as appropriate for students in grades 4-5.								
Cognitive Function: Students at all levels of English language proficiency UNDERSTAND important inventions in history and provide details of their contribution to society.								

To ensure that an individual student experiences the tests that are appropriate for their English language proficiency, test items are developed at different tiers to target different ranges of language proficiency. As shown in Figure 5, for ACCESS Online, the items for each grade-level cluster target two tiers for Speaking and Writing (Tier A and Tier B/C) and three tiers for Listening and Reading (Tier A, Tier B, and Tier C). In addition, for Speaking, a Pre-A tier is available for newcomer students (recent arrivals to the United States) so they can show what they can do without being overwhelmed by the test content.

Figure 5

The Presentation of Tiers across Levels of Language Proficiency and Language Domains



6 Subtest Design and the Standards Framework

We will now consider how the WIDA ELD Standards are implemented within two of the four language domain tests; first the Reading test and then the Speaking test. Figure 6 shows the structure of the Reading subtest for ACCESS Online with its three major components:

1. Stages: Numbered columns headed by the abbreviation of a WIDA Standard (SIL, LoLA, LoMA, LoSS, LoSC)
2. Folders: Stacks of rectangles represent a thematic folder; each folder contains three items, represented by the small rectangles
3. Items: Small rectangles containing a number which indicates the language proficiency level of the item

All students experience one folder targeting Social and Instructional Language in each of the first two stages, then proceed through stages targeting the language of the content areas. At Tiers B and C students see an additional folder in each of the final two stages of the Reading subtest; therefore, depending on a student's English language proficiency, the Reading subtest of ACCESS Online consists of 24 selected response items for Tier A or 30 selected response items for Tier B and Tier C, grouped in either eight or

ten thematic folders, each targeting one of the five ELD standards. Students who complete the Reading domain test demonstrate their English language reading proficiency across all the WIDA ELD Standards, allowing inferences to be drawn from the test scores about ELs' abilities to read texts representative of those needed in their grade-level content classroom.

Figure 6

Mapping Reading Items across Language Proficiency Standards and Levels of Language Proficiency



Table 5 and Figure 7 show an example where the 1:1 relationship between standards and assessment is crystal clear. It is of a grade 6-8 Tier C Language of Science Reading item and its derivative strand of Model Performance Indicators from the Language of Science standard. The strand of model performance indicators in Table 6 is the stimulus for the orientation graphic and text presented first to students to introduce them to the content of the test input (reading passages) and items. Figure 7 shows the second of three reading items on this theme (Life Cycle of a Butterfly) that targets language proficiency level 4.

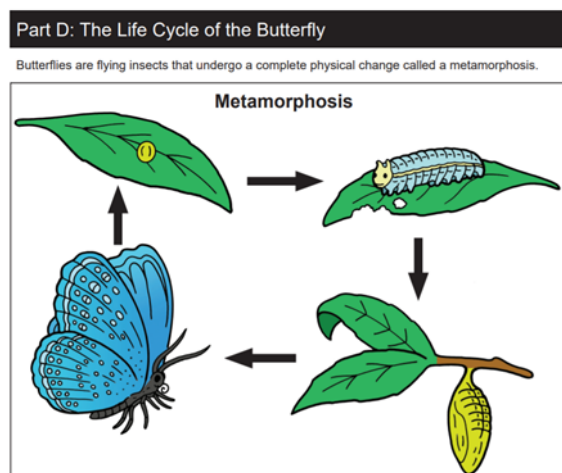
Table 5

A Strand of Model Performance Indicators and an Aligned Sample Reading Item

Topic	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Cycles/ Processes	Match labeled diagrams of cycles or processes with vocabulary from word/ phrase banks	Sort or classify descriptive phrases and diagrams by cycles or processes	Sequence descriptive sentences and diagrams according to cycles or processes	Identify cycles or processes from descriptive paragraphs and diagrams	Associate cycles or processes with their functions from grade-level text

Figure 7

A Sample Reading Item at Proficiency Level 4 Based on the Graphic of the Life Cycle



11

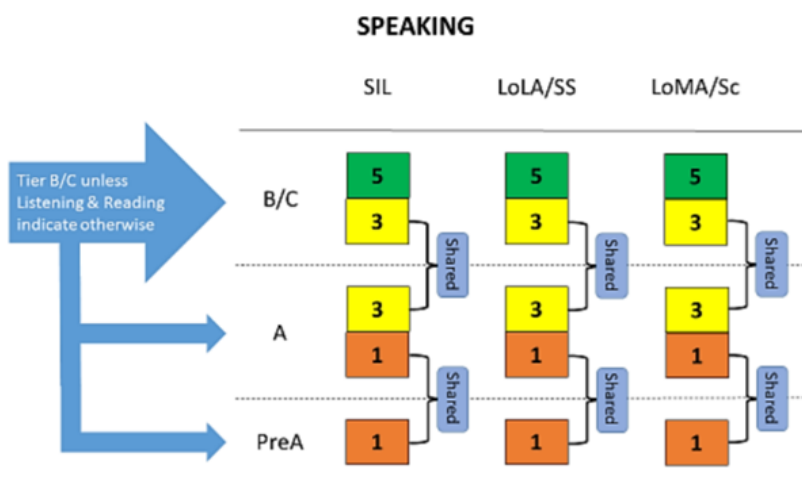
Look at the diagram. A larva has simple eyes, small antennae, and many legs. The larva also has sharp teeth and powerful jaws for chewing food. After it forms a chrysalis, a total transformation occurs. This transformation results in a fully formed butterfly with compound eyes, long antennae, and only six legs. It also develops a proboscis, or flexible tube, for feeding.

What is one physical change that occurs during metamorphosis?

- The number of eyes decreases.
- The number of teeth increases.
- The number of legs decreases.
- The number of antennae increases.

The ACCESS Speaking test, depicted in Figure 8, arrays the WIDA ELD Standards quite differently than on the Reading test. To keep the Speaking test to a reasonable time, it is not possible to administer Speaking tasks to students on each of the individual five standards statements. The ACCESS Speaking test features tasks that integrate the five standards statements and each Speaking test form consists of three thematic folders, each targeting one or more WIDA ELD Standards. Tier A and B/C folders on the Speaking subtest each contain two tasks. Pre-A folders each contain one task.

Figure 8
ACCESS Speaking Test Map by Tier and Standard



See multiple examples of ACCESS Speaking tasks: <https://wida.wisc.edu/assess/access/preparing-students/practice>.

7 Understanding Test Scores in Relation to the Standards

Test scores are reported to students, educators, and state education departments as scales scores (range 100-600), which are used to show student annual growth in academic English language development, and as proficiency level (PL) scores (range 1-6). The PL scores provide interpretations of student

performance based on the WIDA ELD Standards. Stakeholders may use these PL descriptors in each of the four language domains to understand what students can do based on their attained levels of language proficiency on the test. For example, in Table 6, in Kindergarten, score reports feature these PL descriptors characterizing the students' abilities in comprehending spoken English.

Table 6

A Sample ACCESS Score Report for Listening, Kindergarten

LISTENING

Level	Students at this level generally can...
6	...understand detailed stories and ideas related to a variety of topics and situations, including language with multiple meanings and original language
5	...understand stories, messages, or directions and detailed information, including technical and specific language related to a variety of topics and situations
4	...understand main ideas and details in stories, messages, or directions, including language specific to particular topics or situations
3	...understand ideas and some details in language that is related to school
2	...understand messages or directions involving language related to routines and familiar experiences
1	...understand brief messages and short commands

To further support educators' understanding of test scores and to assist with instructional planning, WIDA released a collection of Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition (WIDA, 2016). The Proficiency Level descriptors in Table 6 show the interpretive information provided to stakeholders (educators, students, families) via the official score report issued after an assessment. While this information is important for a score report and is intended to help stakeholders understand what test scores mean in terms of what students can do with their language skills, the PL descriptors may not be sufficiently detailed for instructional planning purposes.

The WIDA Can Do Descriptors: Key Uses Edition provides "examples of academic language use for four specific communicative purposes. These purposes, referred to as Key Uses, were identified based on reviews of literature and a language analysis of college and career readiness standards" (p.3). These descriptors are arrayed within the following hierarchy:

1. Grade clusters (K, 1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-8, 9-12)
2. Language domain (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing)
3. Key Uses (Recount, Explain, Argue, Discuss)

This nested structure provides a rich set of supporting resources to assist key stakeholders in understanding the outcomes of a high-stakes assessment and making informed decisions about students' instructional needs. Intended uses of these descriptors for educators (WIDA, 2016: 3) include:

1. Differentiation of curriculum, instruction, and assessments designed in English based on language learners' levels of English language proficiency
2. Collaboration and engagement in instructional conversations about the academic success of language learners in English environments
3. Advocacy for equitable access to content for language learners based on their level of language proficiency

Table 7 shows a sample taken from the Grades 4-5 Can Do Descriptors for the Key Use Discuss. Stakeholders who receive WIDA assessment score reports can use the students’ proficiency level scores to reference the Can Do Descriptors such as these and gain detailed information on the language expectations for those proficiency levels.

Table 7

A Sample of the Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses

By the end of each of the given levels of English language proficiency’ English language learners can...

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 2 Emerging	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 4 Expanding	ELP Level 5 Bridging	ELP Level 6 Reaching
ORAL LANGUAGE	<p>Discuss by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing own ideas in a variety of ways (e.g., drawing, using gestures, graphing) Tracking the person speaking Sharing own work (e.g., graphic organizers, drawings) to contribute to the conversation 	<p>Discuss by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking turns and applying conventions specific to particular conversations Addressing others according to relationship (e.g., student-peers, student-teacher) 	<p>Discuss by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asking clarifying questions to demonstrate engagement Using examples to clarify statements Answering questions to contribute to a topic 	<p>Discuss by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elaborating on statements of others to extend ideas Presenting creative solutions to resolve communication issues Contributing ideas to co-create group responses 	<p>Discuss by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizing how language can be used to express bias and influence others Challenging ideas respectfully Managing conversations to stay focused on a topic 	<p>Discuss by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examining the value of examples to bring clarity to statements Extend conversations by developing topics with clear examples and information

These close relationships between the WIDA ELD Standards, test design, and test score interpretation are a key benefit of a standards-based assessment system such as ACCESS. In addition, by providing relevant concrete feedback on students’ English language proficiency to educators and administrators at the school, district, and state levels, the educational community can then use ACCESS results to plan for ongoing improvement of their language education programs. Next, we introduce the role of theory as foundational for relationship building among educators for language standards and their related assessments.

8 The Relationship Among Theory, Standards, and Assessment

Outside of federal legislation and its impact on policy and practice, there have been other influences on the relationship between language standards frameworks and language proficiency assessment. Throughout the years, these issues have reverberated throughout the fields of language education and applied linguistics and have tended to revolve around three themes:

1. the treatment of content-driven language instruction,
2. the construct of academic language development,
3. the acknowledgement of multilingualism in teaching and learning.

Although not yet fully adopted in large-scale language assessment circles, these trends are forces that will indeed affect the future, hopefully bringing equity to language-driven assessment efforts.

1. The growing confluence of the fields of language education, applied linguistics, and assessment has strengthened interconnections between language and content (Gottlieb, 2016) to the point the two are integrated within language standards frameworks (WIDA, 2020). It has emerged from an increased reliance on sociocultural context (Vygotsky, 1978) as an arbiter to meaning and the expanding notion of text as oral, written, and multimodal (Jewitt, 2008). This theoretical stance assumes language as a resource, rather than a set of structures, that is influenced by specified purposes, audiences, familiarity with topics, and situations.

Movement in this direction has been occurring within teaching and learning environments across continents even prior to the onset of language standards. The intertwining of

language and content first appeared in Canadian literature in the mid-1980s (Mohan, 1986; Swain, 1988, 1996). This convergence is also evident in Europe and beyond within ‘foreign’ language education with the dual-focused methodology on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), (Marsh, 2002). Additionally, there has been increased recognition of the globalization of thought, the role of technology in unifying a world view, and the mobility of peoples worldwide that have sparked the rethinking of the nature of language learning and teaching in a multilingual world (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016).

2. The increased emphasis on academic language use in large-scale language proficiency assessment of multilingual learners (Frantz, et al, 2014) has been due in part to states’ adoption and development of more rigorous academic content standards. With the federal push for a stronger correspondence between state academic content standards and language proficiency standards, specialized academic language associated with content has come to permeate that of language standards. The co-existence of academic language across language and content standards has, in turn, lent itself in helping to define and shape discipline-specific academic language use in school contexts (Gottlieb & Ernst Slavit, 2014).
3. A paradigm shift is currently underway in the language education community that acknowledges the naturalistic use of multiple languages within educational contexts, with movement away from language separation to approaches that more closely suit daily practices of multilinguals (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017). Referred to as the Multilingual Turn (May, 2013), this phenomenon has been generally grassroots in nature, at a local level-across a community, district, or school, but has also been fueled by scholars (García & Lei, 2018 among many).

Although recognized by applied linguists and test designers in the United States, principles of multilingualism are currently not part of federal law or policy. However, translanguaging (the natural flow between languages) has become more acceptable in classroom contexts as has multiple language use (García, Ibarra Johnson, Seltzer, 2017). Increasingly, multiple languages are being incorporated into project-based learning and classroom assessment (Gottlieb, 2021), however, multiple language use, although endorsed, has yet to be embedded into large-scale language assessment (Chalhoub-Deville, 2019; Shohamy, 2011).

An additional influence on the vision of language standards and assessment over the years has been WIDA’s exponential growth. As a means of remaining current and inclusive, educators, in particular, teachers and state policy makers, have always been involved in the iterative standards frameworks and assessment development cycles. Their ongoing feedback has been the impetus for revisiting the alignment of the system and ensuring its robustness. The current edition of the English language development standards framework, described in the next section, reflects the shift in thinking spurred by educators and researchers over the last decade.

9 The 2020 Edition of the ELD Standards Framework: Movement Toward a Stronger Association Between Standards and Assessment

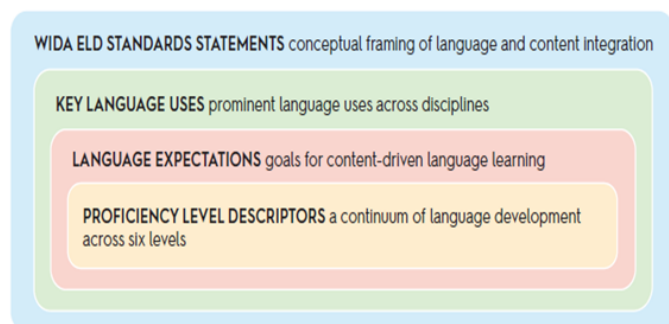
The most recent edition of the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, released in December 2020, in some ways represents a continuity of thought and representation of standards-referenced education for multilingual learners (the term adopted by WIDA in 2018 to reflect a broader more assets-driven representation of children and youth who are or have been exposed to multiple languages and cultures). At another level, it is a departure from its previous editions in that it presents a set of ideologies (or Big Ideas) that overlay the operationalization of the standards statements; namely, 1. equity of opportunity

and access; 2. integration of content and language; 3. collaboration among stakeholders; and 4. functional approach to language development. Together these ideas, threaded throughout the standards framework, have a potential impact not only on large-scale assessment, but also the broader educational landscape of curriculum, instruction, and classroom assessment, thus bringing the two communities closer together.

The components of the newest standards framework are illustrated in the nested figure below. They move from the broadest ELD Standards Statements that encapsulate the integration of content and language across disciplines across the K-12 spectrum to the component of greatest specificity, Proficiency Level Descriptors, that articulate student growth in interpretative and expressive language along a continuum of language proficiency levels for a specified grade-level cluster.

Figure 9

The Components of the WIDA ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Edition (WIDA, 2020, p. 23)



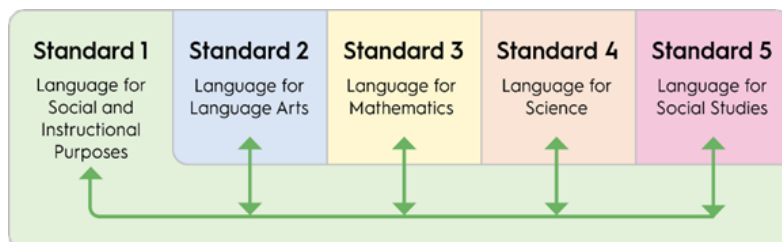
9.1 ELD standards statements

The ELD standards statements remain the entrée point for designing language assessment. Their conceptual framing encompasses language use in the service of learning - that is, for social and instructional purposes and the major subject area disciplines. The abbreviations of the standards statements, shown in Figure 10, have shifted to emphasize the language *for* learning (rather than of learning as delineated in prior editions). This shift allows for the view of language (in standards and other venues) as one serving a specified purpose that is portrayed as action, moving beyond a description of the world to one of creation of a worldview (van Lier & Walqui, 2012).

In the 2020 edition, ELD Standard 1 is unique in that it acts independently as well as in concert with the other four. Its autonomy allows for multilingual learners to share their lived experiences, histories, cultures, and perspectives as a means of jumpstarting or connecting to a theme or topic. Additionally, Standard 1 underpins the other standards and serves as a tool for increasing discipline-specific access while empowering multilingual learners, giving them agency and ownership over their learning. In enacting the standards framework, ELD standard 1 leverages the assets of multilingual learners as the foreground for designing instruction and assessment.

Figure 10

Abbreviations of the Five ELD Standards Statements (WIDA, 2020, p. 25)



9.2 Key language uses

Key Language Uses (KLUs), the second component of the language standards framework, emerged from an updated review of the literature, specifically that of systemic functional linguistics and an extensive analysis of language functions present in state content standards and their disciplinary practices. Originally encapsulated in the Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses, such as the one depicted in Table 8, KLUs are currently viewed as high-leverage genre families (categories of text with shared characteristics or patterns). Four KLUs -narrate, inform, explain, and argue- identified across the academic content standards are further tallied by percent of their presence in each ELD standard. As a result, a series of distribution charts, such as the one for Kindergarten in Table 8, delineates the degree of KLU prominence in each grade-level cluster. By bringing focus and coherence to the language of schooling, the KLUs reinforce the language present in academic content and introduce how functional language can be organized for both classroom and large-scale assessment.

Table 8

The Presence of Key Language Uses in Grade-Level Content Standards: The Kindergarten Distribution Chart (WIDA, 2020, p. 43)

Table 3-3: Distribution of Key Language Uses in Kindergarten

Distribution of Key Language Uses in Kindergarten				
WIDA ELD Standard	Narrate	Inform	Explain	Argue
1. Language for Social and Instructional Purposes	●	●	●	●
2. Language for Language Arts	●	●	◐	◑
3. Language for Mathematics	◐	●	◑	◑
4. Language for Science	◐	●	●	◑
5. Language for Social Studies	◑	●	◐	◑

● Most Prominent ◑ Prominent ◐ Present

9.3 Language expectations

Couching the most prominent KLUs within goals for content-driven language learning for each grade band, Language Expectations are reference coded to ensure portability across curriculum and assessment. One unique feature of this component of the language standards framework is the presence of two communication modes: interpretive (listening, reading, viewing); and expressive (speaking, writing, and representation), in lieu of the four independent language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Recognition of these multimodal communication channels increases accessibility options for students and affords language test developers additional opportunities for measuring language proficiency.

Language Expectations offer goals for all students in their use of language for meeting academic content standards. As such, these statements are identified with a reference code, such as the one shown below (ELD-LA.2-3.Narrate.Expressive), thus facilitating the correspondence between language and content standards.

An extension of Language Expectations, language functions coupled with an array of language features, further specify how multilingual learners might use language to meet the purposes of schooling. Table 9 replicates the anatomy of a Language Expectation for grade levels 2-3, Key Language Use Narrate, Expressive mode (WIDA, 2020, p. 30).

Table 9

An Example Language Expectation with its Language Functions and Language Features (WIDA, 2020, p. 30)

Language Expectation: ELD-LA.2-3.Narrate.Expressive		
Stem	Language Function	Example Language Features
Indicates interpretative or expressive mode	Common patterns of language use associated with Key Language Uses	Sample language resources that carry out specific Language Functions
Construct language arts narratives that...	Develop story with time and event sequences, complication, resolution, or ending through...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saying verbs to add details about characters in dialogs • Verbs to describe what characters do, think, and feel • Pronouns, renaming, and synonyms to reference characters, situations, or ideas across the text • Connectors to sequence time and events, and to combine and link event details

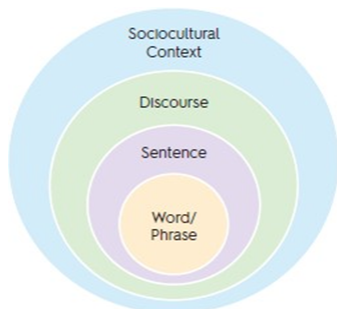
9.4 Proficiency level descriptors

Referring back to Figure 9, the narrowest in scope of the standards framework components, Proficiency Level Descriptors, specify what multilingual learners can do toward the end of a level of language proficiency, from 1 to 5; level 6 is open-ended to indicate language learning as a continuous process. It is recognized, however, that although the Proficiency Level Descriptors are presented in a series of continua, in actuality language development is not a linear process, but rather is contingent on and shaped by the sociocultural context that entails a multilingual learner’s familiarity with the topic, audience, and situation at hand.

As previously mentioned, given the social nature of language learning, WIDA continues to envision three dimensions of language use, each one folded into the next within a sociocultural context. Shown in Figure 11, the discourse dimension triggers meaning for written or oral text through organization, cohesion, and density of language. The sentence dimension relates the grammatical complexity of the text while the word/phrase dimension adds precision to an utterance, text, or task. Historically, the Proficiency Level Descriptors (known as Performance Definitions in prior standards frameworks) have been the basis for interpreting and reporting ACCESS scores.

Figure 11

The Dimensions of Language Use within a Sociocultural Context (WIDA, 2020, p. 32)



Presently, states are in the midst of adopting the 2020 ELD standards framework and crafting plans for its enactment in instruction and classroom assessment. Concomitantly, provisions are being made to fully infuse its components into ACCESS test specifications. Although full operationalization of the latest ELD standards framework in large-scale assessment will take several years, discussion of the transition is underway. The process of implementing this updated edition of the ELD Standards includes a detailed analysis of ACCESS and the other WIDA ELP assessments that must be updated to reflect the intentions of the 2020 Standards Framework. These updates to the assessment entail potential changes to the test specifications, scoring rubrics, and score reports, along with a consideration of whether any new item or task types are required to fully capture the expanded view of language development.

9.5 The significance of the relationship between standards and assessment

WIDA has always been very conscious that the close links between standards and assessment serve as an important piece of validity evidence. The validity of a test, in its simplest terms refers to the extent to which a test measures the construct it was designed to measure (Bachman, 1990; Cizek, 2012). For WIDA, the construct that assessments are designed to measure are its ELD Standards. The standards represent the theoretical perspective of K-12 English learners' language development and also provide a detailed description of language development across grade bands and proficiency levels. Test content, items and tasks, and test scores directly relate to the views of language development defined in the WIDA ELD Standards.

The relationships between standards and assessment are documented in a formal process known as alignment (Cizek, Kosh, Toutkoushian, 2018). If a test and a set of standards are closely aligned, then the test will directly measure the construct defined in the standards and the scores resulting from the test will be interpretable via the standards. This is precisely the close relationship that is desired by WIDA and WIDA's attempts to align assessments with its ELD Standards. If tests are not aligned with the relevant standards, there are serious threats to the validity of such an assessment. These problems are summarized by Cizek, Kosh, Toutkoushian:

A strong linkage—that is, alignment—between specified learning outcomes and any assessment purporting to measure them must also be established. Regardless of whether a test is intended to permit inferences about domain mastery, subject area proficiency, or competence with respect to critical job demands, it is difficult to imagine how the scores from such tests could be confidently interpreted without evidence that there was a tight connection between the knowledge and skills judged to comprise those areas and the content of the assessments (2018, p. 480).

This view has been echoed by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE, 2007), stating that close links (alignment) between state content standards and assessments are important to help determine whether students' test results provide evidence that they have achieved the intended skills specified in the relevant standards. USDE goes on to claim that state content tests must fully represent state standards so that test scores may be used to determine whether students have reached the levels of proficiency defined within the standards. If the test content and items do not fully represent the standards, there will be a risk of construct underrepresentation, which constitutes a major threat to the validity of an assessment.

A fuller discussion of validity and alignment has been reviewed in detail by WIDA, with the seminal work of Webb (1997, 1999) providing an excellent introduction to the process, and that of Cizek (2012) adding important detail with regard to how alignment supports validity evidence for assessment.

Finally, when considering the validity of an assessment, particularly a large-scale, high-stakes assessment such as ACCESS, it is important to pay attention to the technical quality of the test. WIDA publishes extensive data on the technical quality of ACCESS in the ACCESS Annual Technical Report. The report includes test item level data, such as item difficulty measures and fit statistics, from the

underlying Rasch measurement model. These statistics show the technical quality of the items in terms of how they contribute to the overall measurement of a student's language proficiency.

The Annual Technical Report also includes reliability of the language domain subtests (Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing). The following table shows a synthesis of the reliability data from the Annual Technical Report with the reliability data being presented in ranges for all the grade clusters. The Speaking and Writing test reliability statistics are reported as Cronbach's alpha. The adaptive nature of the Listening and Reading tests means that traditional reliability statistics are not applicable, so item response theory reliability data (Thissen, 2000) are reported. Both statistics may be interpreted in the same way. Together, the reliability and validity of ACCESS support the robustness of the assessment and, in turn, the strength of ELD standards representation.

Table 10

ACCESS Reliability Data

Domain	Number of items per grade cluster	Reliability range
Listening	54	0.82-0.86
Reading	72	0.88-0.91
Writing	2	0.56-0.87
Speaking	6	0.80-0.86

10 Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to lay out the interrelated developments in WIDA's English language development standards and its large-scale assessment over the course of close to twenty years. During this time, both the Standards and the assessment have been through multiple iterations, with the assessment usually, though not always, updating to respond to advances in the Standards' frameworks. These advances present both opportunities and challenges to WIDA and its various stakeholders. That the Standards and assessment continuously reflect advances in theory and practice across the U.S. assessment context is vital to WIDA's long term relevance and success.

The close connections between Standards and assessment are essential to users of both resources, so that test scores continue to be meaningful for students, their families, educators, and other stakeholders; such as, district and state education departments, along with international school admissions offices. However, ongoing change at this scale is challenging to manage and stakeholders tend to be attached to the status quo. These tensions between important and meaningful advances, in tandem with clear communication to stakeholders about the need for and benefits of changes, will likely always be a balancing act in need of constant attention.

Alice Walker, a Pulitzer-prize winning North American novelist, has some poignant advice for educators and test developers alike that we should take to heart. She notes, "Look closely at the present you are constructing. It should look like the future you are dreaming." It is our conviction that the care in forming a close relationship between language standards frameworks and their language proficiency assessments yields valuable information to multiple stakeholders, allows for greater confidence in assessment results, and increases their usefulness in standards-based education.

References

Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford University Press.

- Chalhoub-Deville, M. B. (2019). Multilingual testing constructs: Theoretical considerations. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 16(4-5), 472-480. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15434303.2019.1671391>
- Cizek, G. J. (2012). Defining and distinguishing validity: Interpretations of score meaning and justifications of test use. *Psychological Methods*, 17(1), 31-43. DOI:10.1037/a0026975
- Cizek, G.; Kosh, A.; & Toutkoushian, E. (2018). Gathering and evaluating validity evidence: The generalized assessment alignment tool. *Journal of Educational Measurement*, 55(4), 477-512. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jedm.12189>
- Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org>.
Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-95 §114 Stat. 1177 (2015-2016).
- Frantz, R. S., Bailey, A. L., Starr, L., & Perea, L. (2014). Academic language proficiency in school-age English language proficiency assessments under new college and career standards in the United States. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 11, 432-457. DOI: 10.1080/15434303.2014.959123
- García, O., Johnson, S. I., & Seltzer, K. (2017). *The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning*. Caslon.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2018). Translanguaging. *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal1488>
- Gorter, D., & Cenoz, J. (2017). Language education policy and multilingual assessment. *Language and Education*, 31(3), 231-248. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2016.1261892>
- Gottlieb, M. (2021). *Assessment in multiple languages: A handbook for district and school leaders*. Corwin.
- Gottlieb, M. (2016). *Assessing English language learners: Bridges to equity. Connecting academic language proficiency to student achievement* (2nd ed.). Corwin.
- Gottlieb, M. (2004). *English language proficiency standards for English language learners in Kindergarten through grade 12: Overview document*. State of Wisconsin.
- Gottlieb, M., & Ernst Slavitt, G. (2014). *Academic language in diverse classrooms: Promoting content and language learning, definitions and contexts*. Corwin.
- Improving America's Schools Act of 1994*, Pub. L. No. 103-382.
- Jewitt, C. (2008). Multimodality and literacy in school classrooms. *Review of Research in Education*, 32, 241-267. DOI:10.3102/0091732X07310586
- Marsh, D. (2002). *CLIL/EMILE: The European dimension*. Retrieved from https://jyx.jyu.fi/bitstream/handle/123456789/47616/1/david_marsh-report.pdf
- May, S. (2013). (Ed.). *Introducing the "Multilingual Turn": Implications for SLA, TESOL, and Bilingual Education*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203113493>
- Mohan, B. (1986). *Language and content*. Addison-Wesley.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 115, Stat. 1425-2094 (2002).
- Shohamy, E. (2011). Assessing multilingual competencies: Adopting construct valid assessment policies. *The Modern Language Journal*, 95(3), 418-429. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2011.01210.x>
- Swain, M. (1996). Integrating language and content in immersion classrooms: Research perspectives. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 4, 529-548. DOI:10.3138/cmlr.52.4.529
- Swain, M. (1988). Manipulating and complementing content teaching to maximize second language learning. *TESL Canadian Journal*, 6(1), 68-83. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v6i1.542>
- The Douglas Fir Group (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100, (S1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/modi.12301>
- Thissen, D. (2000). Reliability and measurement precision. In H. Wainer, N. Dorans, D. Eignor, R. Flaugher, B. Green, R. Mislevy, L. Steinberg, & D. Thissen (Eds.), *Computerized adaptive testing: A primer* (2nd ed., pp. 159-184). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

- United States. (1965). Elementary and secondary education act of 1965: H. R. 2362, 89th Cong., 1st sess., Public law 89-10. Reports, bills, debate and act. [Washington].*
- U. S. Department of Education. (2007, December 21). *Standards and assessments peer review guidance: Information and examples for meeting requirements of the no child left behind act of 2001.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- van Lier, L., & Walqui, A. (2012). *Language and the Common Core State Standards.* Retrieved from <http://ell.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/academic-papers/04-Van%20Lier%20Walqui%20Language%20and%20CCSS%20FINAL.pdf>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Harvard University Press.
- Webb, N. L. (1997). *Criteria for alignment of expectations and assessments in mathematics and science education* (Research Monograph No. 8). Council of Chief State School Officers.
- Webb, N. L. (1999). *Alignment of science and mathematics standards and assessments in four states* (Research Monograph No. 18). Wisconsin Center for Education Research.
- WIDA (2004). *English language proficiency standards for English language learners in Kindergarten through grade 12.* State of Wisconsin.
- WIDA (2007). *English language proficiency standards for English language learners in pre-kindergarten through grade 12.* Madison, WI: Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, on behalf of the WIDA consortium.
- WIDA (2012). *2012 amplification of the English language development standards, Kindergarten-grade 12.* Madison, WI: Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, on behalf of the WIDA Consortium.
- WIDA (2016). *Can Do Descriptors, Key Uses Edition.* Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, on behalf of the WIDA Consortium.
- WIDA (2019). *WIDA Guiding principles of language development.* The Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Retrieved from <https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/Guiding-Principles-of-Language-Development.pdf>
- WIDA (2020). *WIDA English language development standards framework, 2020 edition. Kindergarten-Grade 12.* Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.

Margo Gottlieb is co-founder and lead developer of WIDA at the Wisconsin Center of Education Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her recent publications and scholarship center on classroom assessment in multiple languages, frameworks for language standards, and linguistically and culturally sustainable curriculum design for elementary and secondary multilingual learners.

Mark Chapman has been part of the WIDA Assessment team since 2015 and contributes to the research, design, and development of WIDA English language proficiency tests. Most recently, Mark directed the project to develop WIDA Screener for Kindergarten. His research interests focus on the validation of language tests for young language learners, with a specialization in constructed response performance assessments.