

ACCESS for English Language Learners (ELLs):

FAQs for Parents/Guardians



What is ACCESS for ELLs?

ACCESS for ELLs is a test of English language skills. It is produced by a non-profit organization called WIDA, which is based at the University of Wisconsin. ACCESS for ELLs measures students' understanding and use of academic English in all four language domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Why is my student taking ACCESS for ELLs?

Being an English learner means that your student is in the process of learning academic English. ACCESS for ELLs helps you, your student, and your student's teachers know how quickly he or she is learning and what types of support will be most beneficial. For example, if a student scored well on all domains but writing, a teacher would be sure to spend more time working on writing skills.

US civil rights law protects English learners and guarantees them effective English language support at school. Federal and state education laws require annual English language proficiency testing because it helps ensure that students' needs are being met so that they can learn English as quickly as possible.

How long should it take my student to reach academic English language proficiency?

Becoming proficient in academic English generally takes between four and seven years. Children who start learning English when they are young tend to learn faster than older children. If a child has had interruptions in education or a learning disability, a little extra time may be needed. Some parents believe that speaking only English to their child will help them learn more quickly, but children who are fluent and literate in their home languages actually learn English more easily and do better in school overall. The amount and quality of support a student has at school also matters. Ask your school how it is supporting your student. Schools appreciate parents' feedback and will work with you to develop the best educational program for your student.

Make sure your student understands that there is no pass or fail when it comes to ACCESS for ELLs. A student's score is one measure of where he or she is on the path toward proficiency; it does not measure how smart the student is.

Is there any risk involved in taking ACCESS for ELLs?

No, there is no risk. Families of English learners may worry that federal agencies such as US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) could access student records. Generally, schools

are considered a “sensitive zone,” such as a church or hospital, and ICE does not take actions against undocumented immigrants at school. However, for your peace of mind, remember that by taking the ACCESS ELL test, you are not required to tell your school about your child’s immigration status or the status of any family members. All children living in the US have the right to attend school, regardless of immigration status.

Schools are not permitted to discourage the enrollment of undocumented immigrant children by asking about their immigration status, denying enrollment to children with foreign birth certificates, or denying enrollment to children whose parents refuse to provide their social security numbers or race and ethnicity information.

If you have any questions about this notice, please contact April Perkins, ESOL Specialist, at (207)624-6627 or april.perkins@maine.gov.