

ELPA21 Kindergarten Screener Q&A

This Q&A identifies common questions and feedback ELPA21 is hearing from states and provides guidance and information for responses and outreach through your state’s communication channels. The intended audience for this document is educators and test administrators.

Why does the proficiency rate appear to be so low for Kindergarten students being screened compared to the off-the-shelf commercial screeners we have been using?

- Unlike prior screeners, the ELPA21 screener provides an assessment of language skills in which reporting of student performance is consistent with that of the ELPA21 annual/summative assessment.
- Unlike many English language proficiency screeners, students taking the ELPA21 screener must demonstrate proficiency in all four language domains rather than score “proficient” on an overall composite score, which could otherwise mask a language domain need.
- The ELPA21 standards were adopted in 2014; some commercial screener versions are older than 2005, prior to linkages to the language proficiency needed to succeed on updated content standards. Some screeners have reset their scale scores, but they still do not align to updated standards.
- The ELPA21 screener is aligned to the ELPA21 adopted standards, and the cut scores for K–12 (other than the Future Kindergarten version) match those required on the summative assessment.
- The screener is deliberately rigorous to ensure that the correct group of students is identified and receives the assistance needed.
- An assessment such as the screener is a snapshot of a student’s performance on a given day; even the best designed test will not provide a 100% accurate measure of all of the student’s language abilities on that day.

Is the Kindergarten screener over-identifying students as English learners?

- Keep in mind that this group of students has not necessarily attended school prior to being screened; therefore, any student registering for Kindergarten for the first time would still be gaining those initial pieces of academic language skills in English. Essentially, most entering Kindergarteners are still developing language, and while they may not necessarily be “English learners” per se, they are in fact at the beginning of their language and literacy development.

- Per the US Department of Education, the screener is required to assess potential English learners in the four language domains of listening, reading, writing, and speaking, and the student must be measured as proficient in all four domains in order to not be identified as an English learner (unless the student is administered the Future Kindergarten version, which varies by state). Since Kindergarten students are generally considered pre-literate, this could lead to identifying any incoming Kindergarten student as an English learner.
- A completed Home Language Survey/Language Use Survey is the first potential identifier of an English learner. The families of incoming students complete a Home Language Survey and indicate the languages the child has been exposed to in a variety of contexts. Home Language Surveys are designed by states and districts and vary widely. For some Home Language Surveys, the mere presence of any language other than English—such as a parent answering *yes* to a survey question because their student sometimes watches a television program in a language other than English—is enough to indicate the student is a potential EL and should therefore be screened. Thus, some students who speak only English may end up being screened. Since the population of incoming students is largest in Kindergarten, this issue is more prevalent. See Linqunti and Bailey (2014) [here](#) for additional information.

What does ELPA21 plan to do to validate and strengthen the reliability of the Kindergarten screener as part of the identification process?

- Conduct studies regarding ELPA21 cut scores and in-year growth on both the summative and the screener
- Conduct analyses of other evidence and data that could inform ELPA21 to improve or change the Kindergarten screener
- Create new task types for the screener that are targeted to incoming students who have not necessarily attended school previously

Does ELPA21 have any recommendations regarding the potential over-identification of Kindergarten students as English learners?

- ELPA21 has recommended that states consider the addition of a “provisional classification” period in which states could implement a procedure for reviewing an identification of a student within a certain number of weeks after the initial identification, using additional measures or evidence to support the student remaining in or being removed from EL services. This could help negate some of the false positives and false negatives in the identification process. The implementation of a provisional classification period would be a state-by-state policy and would need to be



in compliance with federal rules. See Cook & Linquanti (2013) [here](#) for additional information.

- ELPA21 recognizes that identification as an EL is meant to be a temporary status while the student gains the needed proficiency in English. Students who are identified as English learners have the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency each winter/spring on the ELPA21 summative assessment. Without a provisional classification procedure in place, the annual summative assessment is the next opportunity (after initial screening) to demonstrate proficiency.

What about the use of technology? Kindergarten students probably are not proficient with the technology required for the test.

- The screener design and its administration procedures are designed so that factors such as comfort and familiarity with technology do not adversely affect student performance. The screening test begins with a practice segment to allow the student to become familiar with the test format. In addition, the test is not timed, and test administrators may provide technological assistance during the operational portion of the test (some states allow a one-to-one administration for the full test). Please contact your state regarding allowable accessibility supports.