

WIDA Consortium Response to the Alignment Study Results

December 27, 2011

On behalf of the WIDA Consortium, I am pleased to present the results of the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs® Alignment Study. WIDA greatly appreciates the 55 educators from WIDA states who participated in the alignment study. This process is an important part of test validation and the results guide us in our efforts to ensure that ACCESS for ELLs is meaningfully aligned with the WIDA English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards as expressed in the model performance indicators.

We see the results of the study as very positive as they validate the overall design of the test and the process of test and item development employed by WIDA in partnership with the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL). The analyses conducted in this study evaluate alignment by both proficiency levels and standards and indicate that ACCESS test items strongly match the WIDA model performance indicators across almost all grade clusters and domains. The items also meet the depth criterion for most domains across the grade clusters and meet the range criterion for many domains.

Since approximately one-third of the test items are refreshed each year, we are able to use these results to implement a program that strengthens the alignment focusing on the areas highlighted in this study. A discussion of key areas follows.

1) The Kindergarten Form.

The ACCESS Kindergarten test form became operational in the 2008-09 academic year and was developed with feedback from two years of operational ACCESS testing and with advice from a panel of Kindergarten experts. The test is designed to align with the PreK-Kindergarten strands of model performance indicators that were created to address the unique language and developmental needs of young learners. The test form is adaptive and includes numerous integrated tasks built around a narrative and expository story to accommodate students at this grade level.

The results of this study indicate that Kindergarten items have a strong match for almost all levels for Listening, Reading, and Writing but have some weaknesses in Speaking. The methodology employed here is based on the assumption that there should be at least 3 test items per proficiency level. However, the Kindergarten Speaking form is designed to have only 2 items per level as the test administrator determines whether the student should continue to the next level. The questions associated with each item give students the opportunity to produce as much speech as he or she is able. In analyzing the results, we note that reviewers found 2 items for most levels.

In the standards analysis for Kindergarten, several domains showed a weak match for one or more standards. By design, Social and Instructional language is heavily emphasized at this grade level as young learners are being introduced to the language of school and instruction more than content areas. Reviewers' comments suggest they found this

emphasis appropriate for this age group, but we will use these results to consider whether to increase the number of test items associated with the language of content areas.

In looking at range for the Kindergarten form, we note that the test design, with its integrated tasks built around a story, limits the range of model performance indicators that can be assessed. Due to the open-ended nature of the questions, however, students are able to introduce any language that relates to the story.

2) Range.

In analyzing the range results for upper grade level clusters, we see that limitations in range occur largely in the domains of Speaking and Writing. The methodology used in the alignment study was originally developed for tests utilizing a large number of multiple choice items. For grade clusters 1-12, ACCESS for ELLs consists of a limited number of constructed response items in which students are able to demonstrate to a fuller extent their ability to use and produce language. The limited number of items for these productive domains makes it impossible to cover all standards, while the open-ended nature of the tasks allows administrators to evaluate students' proficiency levels based on the Speaking and Writing rubrics.

Finally, in viewing these results, it is important to note that the WIDA model performance indicators that form the basis for ACCESS for ELLs are examples of the ways students use and produce language. Educators in WIDA states are trained to transform the model performance indicators for use with their academic content and to meet the language needs of their students. Since the model performance indicators are transformed to create test items and reviewers must also transform them during the alignment study, there is an added layer of complexity to these studies. WIDA feels that transforming the model performance indicators during development is necessary to ensure that items (and instruction) do not focus only on what we view as examples. However, alignment reviewers may reach different conclusions than test developers depending on how they transform the indicators. In future alignment studies, we may include a list of the transformed model performance indicators so reviewers are able to see the full range of tasks included during the development process.

The fact that these study results largely support the alignment or illustrate intentional design decisions provides strong support for the process and procedures followed in our testing program. Our commitment at WIDA is to continually improve all aspects of our standards and assessment system with the ultimate aim to positively impact English learners' academic and language learning outcomes. Alignment is an important part of ensuring that the system supports that goal.

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