



English Language Proficiency Assessment
for the 21st Century

A photograph of a teacher with long dark hair and glasses, wearing a denim jacket, pointing with a blue marker at a whiteboard. The whiteboard contains handwritten notes and diagrams, including the word "family" and a list of items. The image is overlaid with a blue and purple gradient.

Understanding ELPA21 Student Reports: A Quick Guide for Educators

**English Language Proficiency
Assessment for the 21st Century**

School Year 2026–2027



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Overview of the ELPA21 General Assessment Program

- The ELPA21 Dynamic Screener is a testing instrument used to identify students in need of English learner program support as part of state entrance procedures.
- All students identified as English learners take an annual ELPA21 Summative Assessment in winter/spring. Scores are usually available in May.
- The assessments are designed to measure students' language abilities in the four domains of listening, reading, speaking, and writing.
- In addition to the four domains, students receive a proficiency determination of emerging, progressing, or proficient.
- Students determined to be proficient on the screener are typically not identified for English language development services; students determined to be proficient on the summative have demonstrated the level of English necessary to access classroom content and may be exited from the EL program (reclassified and monitored). Exit criteria may vary by state but must include a proficient score on the summative.

What Is ELPA21?

ELPA21, or the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century, provides screener and summative assessments to state educational agencies. Our state clients administer the ELPA21 Dynamic Screener to identify English learners and the ELPA21 Summative to measure students' English language proficiency from year to year. These assessments are designed to measure the specific language skills students need to interact with grade-level academic language and become college- and career-ready by 12th grade. All ELPA21 assessments are based on English language proficiency (ELP) standards that correspond to state content standards.

Who Takes the ELPA21 Dynamic Screener?

Potential English learners enrolling in Grades K–12 whose home language survey (HLS) indicates a language other than English should take the ELPA21 Dynamic Screener.

Who Takes the ELPA21 Summative Assessment?

All students identified as English learners in Grades K–12 are required to participate in an annual ELP assessment. Consistent with federal law, English learners with disabilities must be provided equal opportunities to learn English language skills and participate in summative testing. For more information on supporting students with disabilities, see the *ELPA21 Accessibility and Accommodations Manual*. For more information on assessing students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, see the *Alt ELPA Accessibility and Accommodations Manual*.

What Are the ELPA21 Domain Profiles?

For the general ELPA21 assessments, the domain profile is the combination of domain subtest scores a student earns for each of the four language domain subtests: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. For each domain subtest, student performance is classified into one of five levels (1–5) based on the domain scale score. Emphasizing students’ domain profiles benefits educators in a couple of ways. First, a student’s domain profile distinguishes between students who may have the same overall score but who differ in skills and needs. Second, the domain profile highlights the relationship between the domains in a way that the overall score does not.

Table 1

ELPA21 General Domain Performance Levels

Performance Level	Descriptor	Definition
Level 1	Beginning	Displays few grade-level English skills and will benefit from EL program support.
Level 2	Early Intermediate	Presents evidence of developing grade-level English language skills and will benefit from EL program support.
Level 3	Intermediate	Applies some grade-level English language skills and will benefit from EL program support.
Level 4	Early Advanced	Demonstrates English language skills required for engagement with grade-level academic content instruction at a level comparable to non-ELs.
Level 5	Advanced	Exhibits superior English language skills as measured by ELPA21.

How Is Proficiency Determined for ELPA21 General Assessments?

Profiles are used to obtain a proficiency determination, classifying students as emerging, progressing, or proficient. The ELPA21 summative and screener assessments are developed by grade or grade bands (Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade Band 2–3, Grade Band 4–5, Grade Band 6–8, and Grade Band 9–12), but different cut scores are assigned at each grade level, except in Grade Band 9–12, where the same cuts are used across grades.

Table 2

ELPA21 General Profiles of Proficiency

Proficiency Determination	Definition	Profiles
Emerging	<p><i>ELPA21 General Summative:</i> Students are Emerging when they have not yet attained a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on ELPA21 by attaining a profile of Levels 1 and 2 in all four domains. Students scoring Emerging are eligible for ongoing program support.</p> <p><i>ELPA21 Dynamic Screener:</i> Students are Emerging when they have not yet reached a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on the ELPA21 screener by scoring Level 1 or Level 2 in listening, reading, writing, and speaking. These students are eligible for English language development services.</p>	1s and 2s
Progressing	<p><i>ELPA21 General Summative:</i> Students are Progressing when, with support, they approach a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on ELPA21 by attaining a profile with one or more domain scores above Level 2 that does not meet the requirements to be Proficient. Students scoring Progressing are eligible for ongoing program support.</p> <p><i>ELPA21 Dynamic Screener:</i> Students are Progressing when, with support, they are approaching a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level academic tasks in English. This is indicated on the ELPA21 screener by scoring at least one domain score above Level 2 and at least one domain score below Level 4. These students are eligible for English language development services.</p> <p><i>Note.</i> In the case of the ELPA21 Future Kindergarten screener, beginning in school year 2021–22, a domain profile consisting of at least one Level 2 domain result and at least one Level 3 domain result is considered Progressing.</p>	Combinations of domain profiles that are not solely 1s and 2s or 4s and 5s. Examples of Progressing Profiles: 2233, 3333, 3443, 1234, 4224, 2335

Proficiency Determination	Definition	Profiles
Proficient	<p><i>ELPA21 General Summative:</i> Students have attained a level of English language skill necessary to independently produce, interpret, collaborate on, and succeed in grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on ELPA21 by attaining a profile of Level 4 or higher in all domains. Once Proficient on ELPA21, students can be considered for reclassification.</p> <p><i>ELPA21 Dynamic Screener:</i> Students are Proficient when they demonstrate a level of English language skill necessary to independently produce, interpret, collaborate on, and succeed in grade-level academic tasks in English. This is indicated on the ELPA21 screener by scoring Level 4 or Level 5 in all domains. Proficient students are not identified as English learners and do not receive English language development services.</p> <p><i>Note.</i> In the case of the ELPA21 Future Kindergarten screener, beginning in school year 2021–22, a domain profile of 3333 or higher is considered Proficient.</p>	4s and 5s
Proficiency Not Determined	<p><i>ELPA21 Dynamic Screener Only:</i> Used when a test administrator determines that the student is unable or unwilling to participate. State policy determines whether or not a non-participant is eligible for English language development services.</p>	Consult state policy

What Information Is on the ELPA21 General Individual Student Report?

Each Individual Student Report (ISR) for the general ELPA21 assessments contains the following information:

- Overall scale score*
- Comprehension scale score*
- Proficiency determination
 - Proficiency determination descriptions
- Domain scale scores*
 - Listening, reading, speaking, and writing
 - Domain performance levels
 - Reporting performance level descriptors (PLDs), *formerly known as achievement level descriptors (ALDs)*

**Note.* Domain and overall scale scores and comprehension scale scores are displayed only on summative ISRs. The overall and comprehension scale scores are provided for program evaluation purposes and are intended for use by policy-makers and administrators.

Figure 1

ELPA21 General Summative Individual Student Report Example

Last, First Grade 4 ELPA21 Summative 2025-2026
 Student ID: 999999999 | Student DOB: 12/12/2014 | Enrolled Grade: 4 DEMO DISTRICT 1
 Date Taken: 2/27/2026 DEMO SCHOOL 1

Overall Scale Score: 5142±205 Comprehension Scale Score: 5247±230 Proficiency Determination: Progressing

Proficiency Determination

Proficiency Determination	
Proficient - Students are Proficient when they attain a level of English language skill necessary to independently produce, interpret, collaborate on, and succeed in grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on ELPA21 by attaining a profile of Level 4 or higher in all domains. Once Proficient on ELPA21, students can be considered for reclassification.	
Progressing - Students are Progressing when, with support, they approach a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on ELPA21 by attaining a profile with one or more domain scores above Level 2 that does not meet the requirements to be Proficient. Students scoring Progressing on ELPA21 are eligible for ongoing program support.	
Emerging - Students are Emerging when they have not yet attained a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on ELPA21 by attaining a profile of Levels 1 and 2 in all four domains. Students scoring Emerging on ELPA21 are eligible for ongoing program support.	
Scale Scores - Scores from different domains have different ranges and should not be directly compared. The same, or similar, scale score on two or more domains might not result in the same performance level on these domains.	

How Does Your Child's Score Compare?

Name	Proficient%	Average Overall Scale Score	Average Comprehension Scale Score
State	15	5127±11	5175±10
DEMO DISTRICT 1	25	4862±342	5031±230
DEMO SCHOOL 1	25	4862±342	5031±230

Performance Level in Each Domain

How Did Your Child Perform on Different Areas of the Test?

Domain	Scale Score	Performance	Domain Description
			1 Beginning 2 Early Intermediate 3 Intermediate 4 Early Advanced 5 Advanced
Listening	513±29	4	When listening, the student at Level 4 is working on: determining the meaning of general academic and content-specific words and phrases, and idiomatic expressions; participating in conversations and discussions, answering relevant questions and building on the ideas of others; determining the main idea or theme and explaining how it is supported by key details.
Reading	509±20	3	When reading grade-appropriate text, the student at Level 3 is working on: determining the meaning of key words, phrases and some idiomatic expressions; reading short literary or informational texts and identifying the main idea or theme and one or two supporting details; gathering information from written sources and identifying key information.
Speaking	491±32	2	When speaking, the student at Level 2 is working on: participating in short conversations, responding to simple wh- questions; delivering short oral presentations or describing pictures and graphs using simple language structures; recounting a simple sequence of events in order; constructing a claim with one supporting reason.
Writing	505±27	3	When writing, the student at Level 3 is working on: producing and expanding simple and compound sentences; composing brief narratives or informational texts, including a few details; constructing a claim about a familiar topic, introducing the topic and providing a few supporting reasons or evidence; asking and answering questions, responding to others' comments, and adding own comments.

Figure 2

ELPA21 General Domain Performance Level Scores

Reading
Level 3
Score Range: 539–630
When reading grade-appropriate text, the student at Level 3 is working on determining the meaning of general academic and content-specific words and phrases in literary and informational text; identifying and paraphrasing main concepts and information; comprehending exchanges of written information or data; explaining the reasons and textual evidence to support a claim; gathering information from multiple sources.

Domain	Scale Score	Performance	Domain Description
Listening	513±29	4	When listening, the student at Level 4 is working on: determining the meaning of general academic and content-specific words and phrases, and idiomatic expressions, participating in conversations and discussions, answering relevant questions and building on the ideas of others; determining the main idea or theme and explaining how it is supported by key details.
Reading	509±20	3	When reading grade-appropriate text, the student at Level 3 is working on: determining the meaning of key words, phrases and some idiomatic expressions; reading short literary or informational texts and identifying the main idea or theme and one or two supporting details; gathering information from written sources and identifying key information.
Speaking	491±32	2	When speaking, the student at Level 2 is working on: participating in short conversations, responding to simple wh- questions; delivering short oral presentations or describing pictures and graphs using simple language structures; recounting a simple sequence of events in order; constructing a claim with one supporting reason.
Writing	505±27	3	When writing, the student at Level 3 is working on: producing and expanding simple and compound sentences; composing brief narratives or informational texts, including a few details; constructing a claim about a familiar topic, introducing the topic and providing a few supporting reasons or evidence; asking and answering questions, responding to others' comments, and adding own comments.

Note. The number noted in the “Performance Level” column represents the student’s performance level in a particular domain. The domain descriptions correspond to the reporting performance level descriptors (PLDs) for each domain and give us information about the student’s academic language abilities.

What Are ELPA21 General Reporting Performance Level Descriptors?

The ELPA21 general reporting performance level descriptors (PLDs), formerly known as achievement level descriptors (ALDs), describe what ELs' language usage looks like at each proficiency level as they progress toward independent participation in grade-appropriate activities. The domain performance description on the ISR corresponds to the PLD for that particular domain and grade level. For example, an examination of the summative domain scale scores in conjunction with the PLDs provides information on within-domain level performance.

What Are Some Considerations for Interpreting Results?

The results are one measure of a student's progress towards English language proficiency and provide specific but limited information. Like all measures of student proficiency, ELPA21 scores should be interpreted alongside other sources of information, such as classroom tests, assignments, teacher observations, content area test scores, and grades.

ELPA21 scores are most useful when used collaboratively by English as a second language (ESL)/English language development (ELD) teachers and content area teachers. Explicit recognition that language acquisition takes place across the content areas benefits ELs' academic experiences. Ensuring that English language development does not interfere with access to grade-appropriate content and practices requires a shift in perception from "What language skills does the student have?" to "What is the student able to do with language in the content areas?" Knowing what students are able to do with the academic language needed to engage in grade-level content instruction is useful for guiding instructional practice and identifying necessary supports. Scores by domain also identify student strengths and weaknesses, inform reclassification decisions, discern patterns of performance in classrooms or groups of students, and identify opportunities for instructional collaboration.

What Are Appropriate Uses of ELPA21 Summative Scores?

ELPA21 Summative scores represent a snapshot of student proficiency at one point in time. The assessment was designed so that scores may be used to:

- Measure English language proficiency progress year to year, allowing teachers and parents to monitor annual progress towards proficiency
- Inform EL reclassification decisions
- Inform state accountability calculation and reporting
- Inform evaluations of program effectiveness for various subgroups of students and adjust educational programming and resources as needed
- Help school officials identify the types of professional development and/or support that teachers need



What Are Appropriate Uses of ELPA21 Dynamic Screener Results?

ELPA21 Screener results represent a brief snapshot of proficiency as students are considered for EL status when entering school. The ELPA21 Dynamic Screener was designed so that score results may be used to:

- Provide entry-level information about a student’s English language proficiency
- Inform initial program eligibility decisions
- Help districts meet program entrance requirements regarding the screening of potential English learners arriving in school districts each year