Hamilton Township School District
ACCESS for ELLs™

All Hamilton Township School District students enrolled in the English Language Learner (ELL) Program (English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or Bilingual) will be administered the ACCESS for ELLs in between the months of March and April. The New Jersey Department of Education stipulates a window of time to administer this assessment.

Legal Requirements

Pursuant to the federal *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001* schools are required to annually assess the English language proficiency of their English Language Learners (ELLs) in kindergarten through grade 12 using a standards-based instrument that is common throughout the state. In response to this mandate, the federally funded WIDA (World-class Instructional Design and Assessment) Consortium currently a group of 19 states, created English language proficiency (ELP) standards that are aligned to the consortium member states' academic content standards. The assessment, ACCESS for ELLs™, was then developed based upon the WIDA ELP standards.

The WIDA *English Language Proficiency Standards for English Language Learners in Kindergarten through Grade 12* (known as the WIDA ELP Standards) are available on the WIDA website at www.wida.us. These standards exemplify the second language acquisition process, and they are innovative in the field because they focus primarily on *academic language* relevant for academic success in the major content areas of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Commercially available tests of English language proficiency are typically not tied directly to any state standards, and they tend to focus on social English and a generic conception of academic English as it relates to language arts. Thus, they do not meet the stringent requirements of *NCLB*, nor do they align with the standards among the consortium states. Consequently, the WIDA Consortium developed the ACCESS for ELLs™ English language proficiency test.

The ELP standards and the ACCESS for ELLs™ meet the federal requirements of assessing ELLs' proficiency levels in the domains of Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing. ACCESS for ELLs™ provides reliable, valid and useful information on ELL progress in learning academic English for use by schools, teachers, students and parents.

Purposes of ACCESS for ELLs™

The ACCESS for ELLs™ English language proficiency test has six main purposes:

- to identify the English language proficiency level of students with respect to state-wide performance standards

- to identify students who may be candidates for English as a second language (ESL) and/or bilingual education services

- to assess annual English language proficiency gains using a standards-based assessment instrument

- to provide districts with information that will help them evaluate the effectiveness of their ESL/Bilingual programs and determine staffing requirements

- to provide data for meeting federal and state statutory requirements with respect to student assessment, and

- to provide information that enhances instruction and learning in programs for English language learners.

Like the NJ NJASK and HSPA tests, **ACCESS for ELLs™ is a secure test**. Only the teacher-administered Speaking part (and the entire kindergarten form) of the test will be scored on site. The other sections of the test will be administered and returned to MetriTech, WIDA's vendor for scoring and reporting.
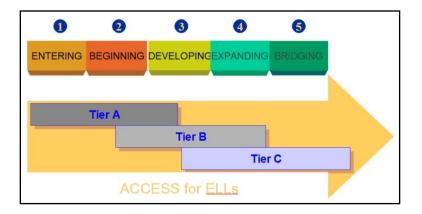
Grade Level Clusters

ACCESS FOR ELLS™ consists of a battery of tests spanning five grade level clusters and five proficiency levels. The grade level clusters include:

- Pre-K-Kindergarten
- Grades 1-2
- Grades 3-5
- Grades 6-8
- Grades 9-12

Tiers

The goal of the ACCESS for ELLs™ test is to determine English language learners' level of English language proficiency and, at the same time, provide useful feedback to stakeholders. However, there are far too many model performance indicators in the English language proficiency standards to fit into a reasonable testing session. For any particular student, some of the questions on a comprehensive test might be dismissively easy, making it boring, while others would be exactingly hard, making it frustrating. It is important to avoid both possibilities in order to produce a valid test. To address this issue, ACCESS for ELLs™ for each grade level cluster test (except kindergarten) is divided into three tiers—A, B and C.

Tier A contains items for proficiency levels 1-3, but targets the lowest levels, 1 and 2. Tier B covers proficiency levels 2-4, focusing especially on 3 and low 4, and Tier C has items from proficiency level 3 to beyond 5, particularly focusing on the uppermost proficiency levels. (See the chart below.)

Determining Tier Placement

Broadly speaking, students can be divided into tiers as follows:

- Tier A = beginning to low intermediate students (proficiency levels 1-3)
- Tier B = low to mid-level students (proficiency levels 2-4)
- Tier C = mid to high-level students (proficiency levels 3-5)

Several factors may be used to determine a student's appropriate tier placement, including:

- Teacher judgment based on his or her knowledge and experience with a student. The *Criteria for Tier Placement for ACCESS for ELLs*™ is a guide to assist teachers in assigning students into their appropriate tier according to given criteria regarding a students' level of English proficiency, educational background, and academic expectations.
- Previous English language proficiency test scores
- Results from the WIDA ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT), a semi-secure placement test aligned with the ACCESS for ELLs™.

The majority of ELLs (70-80%) will be appropriately placed in Tier B. In general, consider a child to be a "Tier B student" unless there is compelling evidence that the child is a true beginner (Tier A) or nearly proficient (Tier C).

Domains

The ACCESS for ELLs™ assesses students in the domains of Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. Each domain is treated as a separate section, or "testlet," within the ACCESS for ELLs™.

Administration times

Speaking	Individually administered	up to 15 minutes per student
Listening	Group administered	approximately 25 minutes
Reading	Group administered	approximately 35 minutes
Writing	Group administered	approximately 60 minutes

The ACCESS for ELLs™ is not a timed test. The above times are given as approximate guidelines and do not include the time necessary for classroom management procedures (e.g., passing out booklets, giving general direction) or going through practice items. Test administrators should monitor student progress and allow them a few minutes beyond the suggested times if the student appears to be near completion on the given task. Students who are struggling and/or will clearly not finish within a reasonable time (within about ten minutes) should be stopped.