



STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NJ Eligibility Criteria for ELP Screening with WIDA Alternate Screener

Purpose

The WIDA Alternate Screener is a paper-based assessment for identifying potential K–12 multilingual learners (MLs) **with the most significant cognitive disabilities**. It is **not intended** for all MLs with an IEP or 504 plan. The goal is to ensure appropriate English language supports are provided for these students so they can work toward grade-level academic goals, participate in general education settings, and be on a path to earn a regular high school diploma.

Who Can Administer the Screener?

- Only Bilingual/ESL-certified staff
- Must complete annual WIDA Alternate Screener training in the [WIDA Secure Portal](#).
- Must pass training with a score of 80% or higher.
- See: [WIDA New Jersey – Test Preparation and Training](#).

Student Eligibility:

There is no federal definition for “most significant cognitive disabilities.” [WIDA defines](#) these students as:

“...individuals who have one or more disabilities that significantly limit their intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, as documented in their IEP, and who are progressing toward English language proficiency in speaking, reading, writing, and understanding.”
(Christensen et al., 2018).

Eligibility Criteria:

- For K–12 students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. expected to qualify for Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) in grade 3.
- For Grades 3–12 students eligible for DLM and Alternate ACCESS.
- For Grades K-2, use the [Participation Decision Tree](#) and make a joint decision between the ESL/Bilingual specialist(s) and the IEP Team
- For students with finalized IEPs, or those who are highly likely to qualify for alternate assessments upon completion of the IEP process—such as Alternate ACCESS (Grades K–12) and Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) (Grades 3–12).

Not all students with disabilities qualify for the Alternate Screener. All eligibility decisions should be documented in the student’s record. See: [English language proficiency screening for students with disabilities](#).

Note: Students previously identified as multilingual learners with WIDA Screener, cannot be rescreened with the Alternate Screener.

Before Testing:

- Meet with the family/caregiver to understand the student's preferred communication method (speech, gestures, AAC, etc.).
- Ensure all necessary **accommodations** are in place (see [WIDA Alternate Screener Accommodations Checklist](#)).
- Optional: Use the [Tell Us About Your Child Survey](#).

Testing:

The Alternate Screener takes about 30 minutes, depending on the student's communication needs and does not include getting materials set up and acclimating the student to the testing environment. All four domains (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing) must be administered for Grades 1-12. For Kindergarten only, Listening and Speaking can be administered during the 1st semester (1st half of the school year). For the Alternate Screener:

- It does not have "stopping criteria."
- It can be given in any order and over multiple days.
- Booklets may be adapted to meet student needs (e.g., cut apart, use manipulatives).
- Students may use preferred tools (e.g., Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices, alternative writing instruments).

Scoring and Multilingual Learner Identification:

- Only the **test administrator** scores the test using the [WIDA Alternate Screener Score Calculator](#).

Grade-specific scoring:

Scores are reported as <3, 3, 4, 5.

- Kindergarten, 1st Semester:
 - Administer Listening & Speaking only.
 - If Oral Score is above 4.0, student is **not an ML**.
- Kindergarten, 2nd Semester – Grade 12:
 - Administer all four domains.
 - If Overall Composite Score ≤ 3.0 , student is **an ML**.

Family Communication

Before and after testing:

Explain the screening process, the student's rights, test results, and available programs/services.

Additional Resources

- [WIDA Alternate Screener Webpage](#)
- [NJDOE Title III Identification](#)
 - [MLs with Disabilities](#)
 - [NJDOE Approved ELP Assessments](#)