

Indiana Department of Education Perspectives on the Transition: How We Got Here, What We Should Remember, and What We Hope for

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The article summarizes the process of Indiana's departure from the original English Language Proficiency Standards and the use of LAS Links as an annual assessment for Indiana's more than 60,000 English language learners (ELLs) to becoming a member of the WIDA Consortium of states. Historical perspectives and rationales for this transition, as well as an early indication of the benefits of this new association, provide an important documentation of the reasons for this significant decision and its anticipated positive impact on Indiana's ELLs.

Historical Account of Indiana's Membership in the WIDA Consortium

Indiana's transition to the WIDA English language development standards, W-APT placement test, and the ACCESS test is one of the most substantial reforms in the past decade in ensuring equity and high quality for Indiana's 60,000 English learners. By joining WIDA, Indiana is placing a particular emphasis on advancing the academic language development and academic achievement for linguistically diverse students through standards, assessments, research, and professional development for educators. This transition also changes the culture of language learning for English learners from the ESL teacher in an isolated setting to one where all teachers own the language acquisition and academic achievement of English learners.

The United States Department of Education's ESEA flexibility waiver requests require states to adopt college and career ready standards and assessments for all students. This requirement includes not only traditional academic subjects and assessments, but also the English language development standards and aligned assessments. Due to the fact that Indiana's previous standards were not categorized as college and career ready, the state had to make a change. The options included revising the current standards to be college and career ready or adopt a set of standards from either WIDA or ELPA21.

IDOE received a white paper in the Fall of 2012 from the Indiana Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (INTESOL) indicating that IDOE should join the WIDA consortium in order to use the WIDA English language development standards and the ACCESS assessment. IDOE leveraged the work of the Great Lakes Comprehensive Center, the WIDA consortium, INTESOL Leadership Group, an internal key stakeholder group, and external work groups to evaluate the 2003 Indiana English Language Proficiency standards in order to make a recommendation on college and career ready English language development standards. The consensus among all of the work groups was to adopt the WIDA English Language Development Standards.

After the recommendation was made, the standards were posted for public comment. Information was disseminated through the DOE Dialogue, INTESOL leadership listserv, and the Title III/NESP Learning Connection community. The comments spanned from all regions of the state and came from educators, administrators, parents, and community members. The overall approval score was 4.43 out of 5 possible points. The internal key stakeholder group then met to review and discuss the public comments. The group made an official unanimous recommendation for Indiana to adopt the WIDA English Language Development Standards. The

standards were officially launched in October 2013 for implementation in the 2014-2015 school year. Information was disseminated through formal announcements in the DOE Dialogue, Learning Connection listservs, IDOE website, newsletters, conference presentations, and leadership meetings.

After the adoption of the new standards, the Office of English Learning and Migrant Education began providing technical assistance and professional development to all educators and administrators on the transition to the new standards. Throughout the 2013-2014 school year, 25 professional learning events were held throughout the state focusing on new standards and specifically discussing the ESEA flexibility and how it impacts English learners.

Additional training was planned to be held throughout the summer of 2014. Feedback was solicited to offer input on the additional trainings. After considering the feedback, it was determined the summer training will would consist of 7 specific WIDA trainings and 19 Indiana Academic Standards trainings where the WIDA standards information will be embedded. Over the course of the summer, 1,500 educators attended the WIDA specific trainings. Video resources from the trainings were developed and posted to the www.doe.in.gov/elme website. Representation from the Office of English Learning and Migrant Education was also present and in leadership position throughout the development of the professional learning and also led the efforts for the scheduled events.

During the 2014-2015 school year, professional development for the implementation of the standards was focused on individual regional and district requests, a trainer of trainers model, and leadership. This approach provided a tailored method with an increase in intensity. Districts or regions requested standards training throughout the year. The requests were evaluated on the number of participants and resources available. In order to achieve a broader reach, districts are

encouraged to invite neighboring districts to the trainings. In addition, Indiana provided training for 90 individuals to become official trainer of trainers. During the summer of 2015, these trainers will be providing WIDA training at 18 events.

To continue the professional development for the WIDA standards implementation, IDOE developed a robust, nationally recognized WIDA standards and ACCESS assessment resources on the IDOE website and the WIDA website. The website includes resources such as the WIDA implementation guide, a series of on demand WIDA webinars on the overview of WIDA, the support materials and resources, transition expectations, and standards alignment. In addition, the summer training workshops will be recorded and posted for viewing at any time.

IDOE has created a WIDA standards and assessment implementation guide. The implementation guide has been completed with input from the Office of Assessment and the INTESOL K-12 Leadership Group. The implementation guide includes an overview of the standards framework, specific Indiana and federal law and policies regarding the implementation, transition guidance, exemplary models, and tools for implementation and planning at the local level. This is a living document and is designed as a reference for LEA and school personnel working with English learners. During the next three years of the ESEA flexibility waiver, IDOE will continue to provide additional updates and resources on the WIDA standards and assessment website.

Train the Trainer professional development by WIDA began in the 2014-2015 school year for 90 individuals. This intentional approach will develop a cadre of regionally trained experts that can assist districts in the local training, professional development, and sustainability practices of the implementation. Particular consideration was placed on the Indiana Educational

Service Centers (ESCs), school corporations, universities, and internal IDOE staff including Outreach Division of School Improvement. English learner population, expertise, geographic location, and content areas were considered in the selection of invitees. The training is designed so that a number of individuals are trained to provide professional development to all types of stakeholders including pre-service teachers. This effort not only builds the capacity at the local LEAs, but also the capacity of the IDOE. The trainers are expected to assist the IDOE in leading upcoming professional development over the next three years.

Professional development by the official trainers and IDOE's Office of English Learning and Migrant Education staff will continue on an ongoing basis as needed and throughout the next three years of the ESEA Flexibility waiver. The training will take the form of individual trainings, summer workshops, and conference presentations. The next three years of trainings will not only include the basic WIDA standards information, but will put a keen focus on depth and breadth of implementation. The trainings will include topics such as WIDA standards for content teachers, lesson planning integration into all subjects, differentiation, collaboration, and leadership. To support these efforts, IDOE will also provide additional professional development each of the next three years for new trainers and will also continue to develop the current trainers in order to build capacity.

WIDA W-APT and ACCESS

Before Indiana could officially join the WIDA consortium, it had to receive an official Attorney General opinion that joining the consortium would not violate HEA 1427, which does not allow the state to join a consortium that requires Indiana to cede authority. This is particularly important because a state can always adopt the WIDA ELD standards, but a state cannot implement the aligned assessment without joining the consortium. IDOE received the

approval that joining the consortium would not violate HEA 1427 and was able to join and provide the W-APT and ACCESS assessments beginning in the 2014-2015 school year.

W-APT, ACCESS, and Alternate ACCESS were implemented in the 2014-2015 school year. The Office of English Learning and Migrant Education and the Office of Student Assessment designed and carried out a high quality plan for a smooth transition and implementation. IDOE reached out to various other states that have made the transition from LAS Links to ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS. This provided IDOE with particular insights and strategies for a smooth transition. The Office of English Learning and Migrant Education was also in close contact with the Title III federal program officer to ensure compliance throughout the transition. The transition plan included webinars, workshops, technical assistance, updates, and timelines to the field.

IDOE will transition to ACCESS 2.0, the new online version of ACCESS, in the 2015-2016 school year. IDOE will coordinate with the WIDA consortium to determine the implementation of the ACCESS 2.0 and the Alternate ACCESS, which will include training for administrators, technology needs for the online assessment, grade level specifications, and needed support. Technical assistance and professional learning for the transition to ACCESS 2.0 and Alternate ACCESS will be based upon stakeholder feedback and lessons learned from the transition to ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS.

Monitoring of the implementation of the assessments occurs through five methods. First, testing information is collected through the Language Minority (LM) data collection. This collection allows IDOE to analyze how many students have participated in the new W-APT placement test and previous English language proficiency annual assessments. This collection indicates how many students should be participating in the annual ACCESS and Alternate

ACCESS assessments. Second, IDOE monitors through the Corporation Test Coordinator's registration and assessment management via the WIDA access system. This allows IDOE to calculate who is and who is not accessing the system. Third, IDOE monitors through the Title consolidated monitoring visits, Title III monitoring visits, Title III desktop monitoring, and the state Non-English Speaking Program monitoring. Fourth, IDOE monitors through implementation surveys. The surveys provide data on implementation and additional support and technical assistance that may need to occur. Fifth, data will be analyzed after the completion of the 2015 ACCESS assessment, Alternate ACCESS, and the ACCESS 2.0 in subsequent years. The expected analysis of ACCESS will be conducted in a similar format so that conclusions can be drawn that informs practice, policy, and procedures.

The Office of Student Assessment and the Office of English Learning and Migrant Education conducted a linking study during the Fall semester of 2014 to analyze the WIDA standards in comparison to Indiana's new Academic Standards in E/LA, mathematics, and science. In addition, a bridge study will be conducted in the Spring 2015 through the fall of 2015 to compare LAS Links assessment expectations with those of the WIDA ACCESS assessment. The bridge study will provide information and guidance on transitioning to accountability measures using the ACCESS assessment.

The IDOE will continue the administration of ACCESS 2.0 and Alternate ACCESS in Spring 2016 and Spring 2017. The IDOE will coordinate with the WIDA consortium to determine the implementation of the ACCESS 2.0 and Alternate ACCESS assessment which will include training for administrators, technology needs for the online assessment, grade level specifications, and needed support. Technical assistance and professional learning for the continued implementation of ACCESS 2.0 and Alternate ACCESS will be based upon

stakeholder feedback and lessons learned from the transition to ACCESS 2.0 and the continued use of Alternate ACCESS.

Benefits of Membership

Indiana's membership in the WIDA consortium has been invaluable for the state. Indiana was the 36th state to join the WIDA consortium, which allows for powerful collaboration between educators all across the country who are working together to meet the needs of diverse students. Indiana not only shares students with other states but also challenges and successes. Additionally, the team at WIDA is well-respected in the field of English learners who support Indiana. Indiana is better suited to improve the academic performance of our English learners through WIDA's continuous improvement of their assessments, professional development offerings, and impact on policy at the federal level.

Early Outcomes

Indiana's educators are just beginning the process of analyzing ACCESS data. The informal feedback from teachers has indicated that ACCESS is better aligned to the current language expectations of the classroom and other state assessments. The implementation of the WIDA ELD standards put an intentional focus on meeting the needs of English learners in ALL classrooms. We are seeing improved collaboration between content area teachers and EL teachers. Educators are recognizing that the research behind the WIDA ELD standards framework can be applied throughout the curriculum and all classrooms. WIDA's emphasis on its can-do philosophy, academic language development, appropriate supports, and data-driven instructional approaches need to be tenets of every classroom with every student. However, this benefit is also a

challenge, as Indiana still has work to do to make sure all educators of English learners are well equipped to carry out this task. Indiana's teachers will need continuous and comprehensive training to ensure that English learners are provided with meaningful access to the core curriculum while developing their language skills.

Conclusion

The adoption of the WIDA was a big, first step in hopefully many more to come. The 2015 Indiana General Assembly approved a doubling in the state funded Non-English Speaking Program. Other efforts are being made at the local and state level to further improve educational outcomes for English learners. The adoption of a research-based framework that is used by all educators is a vital foundational piece that Indiana can continue to build upon. However, Indiana has to ensure that WIDA does not become just a compliance check but rather an embedded, living presence that makes a difference in the lives of children through the education they receive.