

Spring 2015 NYSESLAT:

Questions and Answers

Updated March 23rd, 2015

INTRODUCTION

The Spring **New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT)** is designed to annually assess the English language proficiency of all **English Language Learners (ELLs)** enrolled in Grades K–12. The NYSESLAT is the approved New York State assessment instrument to measure the English language proficiency of English language learners (ELLs) in grades K-12 in all public and charter schools. This secure assessment determines a student's growth in English language proficiency, continued eligibility, and the amount of program services in an English as a New Language (ENL) and/or Bilingual Education (BE) program the student is eligible to receive. In New York State, a student is considered an ELL until s/he achieves the Commanding/Proficient level on the NYSESLAT. The NYSESLAT is one component of the State's compliance with Federal laws that mandate annually assessing and monitoring the English Language proficiency of all ELLs. The results of the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT will drive the provision of ELL services as prescribed in **Commissioner's Regulations Part 154-2 and 154-3**. In the classroom, the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT results provide important information about each ELL's English language development that helps inform and drives instruction aligned to the **NYS Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)**, **Blueprint for ELL Success (BELLS)** and **Bilingual Common Core Initiative (BCCI)**, thereby ensuring that all ELLs are college and career-ready upon graduating high school in New York State.

This document is designed to provide responses to some of the questions frequently asked about the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT.

Additional questions?

Please send questions or comments to the Office of State Assessment at
emscassessinfo@nysed.gov.

A. QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE NYSESLAT

A1.

Q: Why do we administer the NYSESLAT?

A: The NYSESLAT is administered in order to measure English language proficiency and progress for ELLs. NYSED administers the NYSESLAT to ELL students in Grades K – 12 in compliance with the Federal Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESEA) of 2001, which is more commonly known as “No Child Left Behind.” NYSESLAT has been administered every year since it was first required by Federal statute in the 2002-2003 school year.

Specifically, Title III of ESEA requires that all states annually assess the English language skills of ELL students. According to section 3121(d)(1), each state must use evaluation measures designed to assess “the progress of children in attaining English proficiency, including a child’s level of comprehension, speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in English.”

Title III of ESEA also requires that an annual assessment of ELL students be based on specific student achievement objectives. Section 3113(b)(2) states that the “agency will establish standards and objectives for raising the level of English proficiency that are derived from the four recognized domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and that are aligned with achievement of the challenging state academic content and student academic achievement standards described in [Title I].”

A2.

Q: Who takes the NYSESLAT?

A: A student identified as an ELL through the New York State ELL Identification Process (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/bilinged/pub/LEPproc.pdf>) must take the NYSESLAT each year until he or she exits ELL services.

During the 2013-14 school year, over 240,000 students were eligible to take the NYSESLAT, amounting to 8.9% of the 2.7 million students in New York State. Of the students who took the NYSESLAT in the 2013-14 school year, the majority (63.3%) were new ELLs, and a quarter (24.9%) were long term ELLs (i.e., students with seven or more years of ELL service). 21.9% of ELLs are also identified as being a student with a disability, and 8.7% of ELLs are considered Students with

Interrupted/Inconsistent Formal Education (SIFE) The ten most common home languages of ELL students during the 2013-2014 school year were Spanish (61.3%), Chinese (10.2%), Arabic (3.9%), Bengali (2.9%), Haitian Creole (1.7%), Russian (1.6%), Urdu (1.7%), French (1.3%), Karen (0.9%), and Nepali (0.8%).

During the 2013-14 school year, 16.0% of ELLs scored “Proficient” on the NYSESLAT, meaning that they exited from ELL status, and were eligible to receive supplemental ELL services and supports for two additional years.

ELL students’ performance on other educational outcomes demonstrates the clear need for BE and/or ENL services. For example, during the 2013-14 school year 3% of ELLs in grades 3-8 achieved proficient scores on New York State ELA tests compared to 33% of non-ELLs. Likewise, in the 2013-14 school year the graduation rate for ELLs in New York State was 31% compared to a graduation rate of 79% for non-ELLs. Moreover, the proportion of ELLs meeting the State’s Aspiration Performance Measure (i.e., who meet Common Core course-level expectations) was 3%, compared to a rate of 39% for non-ELLs.

For additional demographic information on the State’s ELL students, see <https://www.engageny.org/resource/spring-2015-nyseslat-resources>.

A3.

Q: When is the new version of the NYSESLAT being implemented and what is its impact on students?

A: In Spring 2013, the Department proposed to the Board of Regents and shared with the field a plan to continue the transition of the NYSESLAT to measure the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and reflect the Bilingual Common Core Initiative’s (BCCI) and New Language Arts Progressions (NLAP) beginning with the Spring 2015 administration (known as the “Phase 2” NYSESLAT). This plan was confirmed with the field in Spring 2014.

We recently posted additional information about the 2015 NYSESLAT (see <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/nyseslat/> and <https://www.engageny.org/resource/spring-2015-nyseslat-resources>) and are conducting regional trainings. Based on participant feedback, we have made some improvements to the training materials. The revised editions and new educator materials will continue to be posted at the locations listed above.

We are pleased that the 2015 NYSESLAT will now be aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards and the Bilingual New Language Arts Progressions being taught in classrooms throughout the State. However, we recognize that this

continues to be a transition and, as was done during the transition to the Grades 3-8 Common Core English Language Arts and Mathematics Tests, we plan to take steps to ensure that the transition does not immediately create greater levels of required services. For example, during the transition to the Grades 3-8 Common Core ELA and Math tests in Spring 2013, we kept the number of students statewide for whom schools would be required to provide academic intervention services very close to the number required to receive these services following the administration of the pre-Common Core tests (2012).

Therefore, the Department is ensuring that for one year, the statewide percentages of students at the various NYSESLAT performance levels used for service delineation and teacher evaluation purposes will correspond to similar levels as were achieved by students on the 2014 NYSESLAT. The Department will issue 2014 to 2015 test score conversion charts this summer, similar to those provided in previous years for other testing program transitions.

Following the 2015 test administration, we will convene a representative group of educators to give us feedback on the NYSESLAT's measurement of the standards, as well as any gap between current levels and potential future levels of students identified for required services.

We believe this reflects the proper balance as we continue to phase in the new Part 154 regulations to best serve the needs of ELLs.

In addition, please be aware that the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages posted additional information about Part 154 service level requirements on its website (<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/resource/cr-part-154/units-of-study-tables.html>). As you will see from these materials, the service level requirements have decreased at the high school level, and students may now earn graduation credit while receiving ELL services. In addition, the Department has proposed additional certification flexibility for those seeking to earn their Supplementary Bilingual Education Extension and Supplementary Certificates for English to Speakers of Other Languages (see <http://www.regents.nysed.gov/meetings/2015Meetings/March/315p12hed2.pdf>).

A4.

Q: What test prep materials are available?

A: NYSED does not endorse “test prep” for any assessments, including the NYSESLAT. Test prep tends to detract from the amount of classroom time

available for standards-based instruction that helps improve students' English language acquisition.

Test prep that is designed to artificially inflate a student's NYSESLAT score, whether it be for school-level accountability, APPR, or to help with the student's socio-emotional well-being will actually significantly disadvantage the student because of how the provision of ELL services are tied by regulation to a student's performance on the NYSESLAT.

For example, a student who engages in extensive test prep, but does not actually increase measurably in terms of his or her English language acquisition, may artificially receive a higher NYSESLAT performance level than appropriate, which will result in an inappropriate level of services. This student will likely struggle due to not having access to sufficient ELL services and supports to succeed in grade-level content classes.

Unlike test prep that is designed to artificially inflate a student's scores, NYSED does encourage educators to familiarize their students with the concepts measured by the NYSESLAT. Information on the NYSESLAT is available on EngageNY at <https://www.engageny.org/resource/spring-2015-nyeslat-resources>. However, we recommend that teachers familiarize themselves with the Bilingual Common Core Initiative.

B. QUESTIONS ABOUT WHAT THE NYSESLAT MEASURES

B1.

Q: What does the NYSESLAT measure?

A: The Spring 2015 NYSESLAT measures the Linguistic Demands necessary to meet the discipline-specific standards at the corresponding grade-band level. The Linguistic Demands are derived from the New Language Arts Progressions of the Bilingual Common Core Initiative. In the classroom, the demands identify the words, phrases, and forms of language that students need to understand and use in order to meet discipline-specific standards in K-12 across all four modalities (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing).

The Linguistic Demands are articulated for the purposes of assessment development as Targets of Measurement (TOMs). TOMs are what New York State designates as the standards measured by the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT. Finally, to capture performance with the necessary level of precision, every

grade-band level TOM has been delineated across five levels, which are known as the Performance Level Descriptions (PLDs).

Each question on the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT targets a specific modality and specific grade-band TOM at one of five PLDs.

B2.

Q: How does the NYSESLAT measure English language acquisition across varying levels of student performance?

A: Each ELL has a current baseline English proficiency where he/she is along the continuum of English language acquisition. For the purposes of describing these baseline proficiencies, in New York State the English language proficiency continuum has shifted from four levels (Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, and Proficient) to five levels (Entering, Emerging, Transitioning, Expanding, and Commanding).

Entering (formerly Beginning)

A student at the Entering level has great dependence on supports and structures to advance his or her academic language skills. As measured by the NYSESLAT, a student at this level has yet to meet the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate proficiency in a variety of academic contexts within this grade level.

Emerging (formerly Low Intermediate)

A student at the Emerging level has some dependence on supports and structures to advance his or her academic language skills. As measured by the NYSESLAT, a student at this level has yet to meet the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate proficiency in a variety of academic contexts within this grade level.

Transitioning (formerly Intermediate)

A student at the Transitioning level shows some independence in advancing his or her academic language skills. As measured by the NYSESLAT, a student at this level has yet to meet the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate proficiency in a variety of academic contexts within this grade level.

Expanding (formerly Advanced)

A student at the Expanding level shows great independence in advancing his or her academic language skills. As measured by the NYSESLAT, a student at this level is approaching the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate proficiency in a variety of academic contexts within this grade level.

Commanding (formerly Proficient)

A student at the Commanding level is now designated as a Former ELL, and entitled to receive two years of continued ELL services. As measured by the NYSESLAT, a student at this level has met the linguistic demands necessary to demonstrate proficiency in a variety of academic contexts within this grade level.

The continuum of English language proficiency as articulated by these performance levels is different from, though related to, the continuum of academic demands. Students at all levels of English language proficiency need appropriate scaffolds to meet discipline-specific standards in the content-area classroom.

Unlike past versions of the NYSESLAT, every 2015 NYSESLAT question is written to a specific performance level for a given Target of Measurement. By doing this, there is a strong connection between the English language expectations for students across the five levels and the individual questions on the test.

Note that because the NYSESLAT now measures the Common Core and New Language Arts Progressions a student who scored at one of the old four levels of proficiency may not necessarily score at the corresponding one of five new proficiency levels.

C. QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TEST ITEMS ON THE NYSESLAT

C1.

Q: What types of questions are on the NYSESLAT?

A: The NYSESLAT has questions that cover the four language modalities of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Speaking is measured through a series of tasks. Each task presents the student with short stimuli and prompts to which the student must respond using spoken English.

Listening is measured by having the student listen to a passage and then respond to a series of multiple choice questions about that passage.

Reading is measured by having the student read a passage and then respond to a series of multiple choice questions about that passage.

Writing is measured by having students respond to a prompt in writing. The prompt is based on one of the reading passages a student previously read in the reading section of the test, but is both read to the student and is available for the student to read independently or follow along. There are two types of writing questions: Short Constructed Response (SCR) and Extended Constructed Response (ECR). ECR writing prompts require a longer response than SCR writing prompts, and as such, are able to measure different writing skills.

Whereas the above descriptions apply to grades 1-12, the NYSESLAT for kindergarten students differs to allow for the developmental differences associated with this age group. For example, instead of requesting that students respond to SCR or ECR questions, kindergarten students are instead asked to engage in illustrated/written language tasks.

C2.

Q: Why do NYSESLAT questions seem to be about similar content?

A: The NYSESLAT reflects an approach that integrates language modalities within the context of grade-level academic content.

In a typical classroom, teachers recognize that a student's language skills are integrated. Likewise, the Progressions and the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT integrate the modalities of Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing. In the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT, this integration is created by what are known as Global Themes, which guide the passages and graphics on the assessment. The Spring 2015 NYSESLAT is designed to measure the language that is embedded in content, rather than the content itself. This content is reflected in informational and literary passages that a student would typically experience in the classroom. The Global Themes are broad enough to support passages and graphics across multiple disciplines/content areas. The intent of utilizing Global Themes is to provide students with an assessment experience that is cohesive and interconnected across modalities, and as such, similar to a relevant instructional experience provided by a well-developed unit of study.

C3.

Q: My student can't read at grade level, so why does the NYSESLAT have grade-level passages?

A: The CCLS for ELA/Literacy articulate a research-based need for increased text complexity across all grades in order to prepare all students, including ELLs, for success in college and careers. The Spring 2015 NYSESLAT's reading passages are within the CCLS grade bands for text complexity (See <http://achievethecore.org/page/642/text-complexity-collection> for more information about text complexity). In addition, due to the integrated approach to content, the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT focuses on specific topics and/or aspects of instruction that students encounter in their content-area classes—for example, experiences with literary texts in ELA, word problems in Mathematics, informational texts in Science, and maps in Social Studies.

C4.

Q: If the NYSESLAT is supposed to measure English language acquisition relative to the linguistic demands of the grade-level classroom, why are there passages from disciplines such as social studies and science on the test?

A: In keeping with the other changes to the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT, the approach to language production and reception has also shifted to reflect Common Core instruction. The questions measuring the receptive (Listening and Reading) and productive (Speaking and Writing) modalities on the exam reflect the questions and tasks from content-area classroom activities in that they are firmly based in academics as opposed to personal experience or background. Due to the constructs being measured, and in alignment with the purpose of the exam, the questions focus on the language and language structures that support the content as opposed to the content itself.

Importantly, although test questions are “couched” in grade-level content, the items do not actually measure content knowledge, but instead, the English language acquisition necessary to access grade-level classroom content. All test questions have been subjected to careful review to minimize the degree to which a student needs prior content knowledge (rather than English language acquisition) to correctly answer each question.

D. QUESTIONS ABOUT ADMINISTERING THE NYSESLAT

D1.

Q: How is the administration of the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT similar to, and different from, the administration of the Spring 2014 NYSESLAT?

A: To learn how the administration of the current and past NYSESLAT tests are similar and different, see the document “Comparison of Spring 2013-2014 NYSESLAT to Spring 2015 NYSESLAT”
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/nyseslat/2015/overviewchanges15.pdf>

E. QUESTIONS ABOUT SCORING THE NYSESLAT

E1.

Q: What information is available to assist educators with learning how to score the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT?

A: In Spring 2015, a number of turnkey trainings have been held around the State to help ELL leaders learn how to educate other ELL teachers with how to score the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT. These materials are available at
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/nyseslat/>.

You can also contact the Regional Bilingual Educators Resource Networks (RBERNs) for additional information and questions at:
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/biling/bilinged/betac.html>

For additional information on the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT, see
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/assessment/nyseslat/> and
<https://www.engageny.org/resource/spring-2015-nyseslat-resources>