

## Your Question:

You asked for examples of criteria used by states to exit students from English language learner programs.

## Our Response:

States have established varying levels of criteria to transition students out of ELL programs. Some states have defined the criteria in code while other states use state education agency guidance in conjunction with broad code. Based on our scan of state policy relating to exit criteria for ELL students, states use assessments, teacher and parent input and continued monitoring as criteria to transition students out of ELL programs. Alongside their exit criteria, states have established policies to track and monitor exited students' progress outside of an ELL setting.

In 2014 ECS conducted a [50 state scan of state English language learner policy](#). While the database was last updated in 2014, the data point #7 provides a snapshot of how states approach ELL exit criteria. In this document, you will find an overview of the federal and state landscape relating to ELL exit criteria as well as a series of state policy examples.

## Federal Policy

The United States Department of Education has set base criteria for the transition of students out of ELL programs. In a [2015 Dear Colleague Letter](#), the department clarifies requirements for transitioning students out of ELL programs (see p.32 et seq):

- The use of a valid and reliable English language proficiency assessment to evaluate a student's proficiency in the four language domains (listening, speaking, reading and writing).
- The assessment must adequately evaluate the students in all four domains. The measure can be a composite assessment that includes a valid and reliable measure of all four domains.
- A proficient score on the assessment should indicate that the student can participate in grade-level content instruction without EL services successfully.

Other federal law and department of education guidance may affect states' ELL exit criteria. For example, under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states must consider EL students' progress in their accountability measures. As noted in a [2016 ECS brief \(p.13-14\)](#), states must actively monitor EL student progress through proficiency assessments and continue to track student progress after reclassification. As noted in a [2016 report from the Council of Chief School Officers \(p. 10\)](#), Title III of ESSA now requires states to establish and implement statewide, standardized entrance and exit procedures for EL students.

As you will see in the state examples, many states have included statewide assessments and monitoring in their ELL exit criteria.

## Additional Resources:

- [Non-Regulatory Guidance: English Learners and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (U.S. Department of Education)
- [National Evaluation of Title III Implementation— Report on State and Local Implementation](#) (AIR, 2012)

## State Policy Examples

States have generally taken two policy approaches to establish ELL exit criteria. Some states govern reclassification and exiting of ELL students through code with some additional granularity provided in state department of education

guidance; other states appear to govern reclassification and exit entirely through department of education guidance.. State criteria for exiting ELL programs focus on three general measures:

- Achievement of an assessment score that demonstrates English proficiency,
- Input from teachers, parents, or other school personnel, and
- The student’s overall academic performance.

States use a range of criteria as well as varying levels of local control in their criteria for exiting students out of ELL programs. Alongside criteria for a student to exit an ELL program, many states have also put in place measures to continually monitor the student’s progress after they exit.

**California:** The procedures used to reclassify a pupil from English learner to proficient in English include, but are not limited to, a responsible administrative mechanism for the effective and efficient conduct of the language reclassification process, which must include each of the following procedural components:

- Assessment of language proficiency using the English language development test.
- Participation of the pupil’s classroom teacher and any other certificated staff with direct responsibility for teaching or placement decisions of the pupil.
- Parental involvement through:
  - Notice to parents or guardians of language reclassification and placement, including a description of the reclassification process and the parent’s opportunity to participate; and
  - Encouragement of the participation of parents or guardians in the school district’s reclassification procedure, including seeking their opinion and consultation during the reclassification process.

In addition to criteria for reclassification, California [code](#) requires districts to monitor the progress of reclassified students to ensure the correct classification and placement.

**Florida:** Students are transitioned out of Florida’s English for Speakers of Other Languages program when they have obtained:

- A “proficient” score on their grade level English language proficiency assessment.
- The following scores on statewide assessments:
  - Grades K-2, there is no statewide assessment. The only measure is the grade level English language proficiency assessment.
  - Grades 3-9, students must obtain a passing score on their grade level Florida Standardized Assessment (FSA) in English language arts or an equivalent score on Florida Standardized Alternative Assessment (FSAA).
  - Grades 10-12, students must obtain a score on the FSA or FSAA that is sufficient to meet graduation requirements.

Depending on when the scores are received, a student who meets the criteria must be released from the program by the end of the school year or within two weeks of the beginning of the next school year.

### **Reevaluation of ELL Classification**

Also, regardless of a student’s English proficiency exam, or statewide assessment score, Florida code provides for a re-evaluation of a student’s ELL classification. Re-evaluations can be requested by a student’s teacher, counselor, administrator or parent. For re-evaluation, an ELL Committee is formed and must follow procedures outlined in code.

If a majority of the ELL Committee determines that the student is English language proficient, the student is exited from the program. The parents’ preference as to whether a student is considered English language proficient is considered in the final decision.

## Ongoing Monitoring of ELL Students

Florida [code](#) has a provision to evaluate the performance of former ELL students over the course of their first two years outside of the ELL program. If the student obtains a failing grade or underperforms on an assessment, an ELL Committee will evaluate the student's need for language services. The ELL committee can recommend an ELL Student Plan that provides recommendations for additional services and evaluation.

**Colorado:** The Colorado administrative [code](#) defines a redesignated student as one who has achieved a level of fluency on a reliable and valid language proficiency assessment and has achieved a level of partially proficient or proficient on the state test. An exited student is a student who has been redesignated as fluent, has completed two consecutive monitoring years and is ready for formal exit into the mainstream.

The state allows districts to develop a standard process for determining student English proficiency to determine reclassification and program exit, and requirements for this process are found in the state Department of Education its 2016 ELL [guidebook](#). As part of the redesignation and exit process, districts must have a body of evidence demonstrating language and grade level content proficiency. The body of evidence should include:

- A score of 5.0 overall on the ACCESS for ELL assessment and a score of 5 in Literacy on Tier B and C.
- Evidence to confirm English fluency relative to the Colorado English Language Proficiency standards.
- At least one piece of local data that confirms grade-level proficiency in reading.
- At least one piece of local data that confirms grade rade-level proficiency in writing.

In the guidebook, the state also provides specific examples of student work that can demonstrate proficiency in English language, reading, and writing. The decision to exit a student from an ELL program must be made by a committee who reviews the student's body of work.

The state department of education also requires that the student is monitored for two years after being redesignated. If after two years the student can perform at grade level and does not need EL services, the student will be formally exited.

**District of Columbia:** The Office of the State Superintendent of Education issued guidance on ELL exit criteria in a 2017 [guidebook](#) on delivering education services to English learners. In the guidance, the department states that for a student to exit an ELL program:

- They must obtain a score of 5.0 on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 assessment; and
- Parents should be notified of the decision to exit the student from ELL program and have an opportunity to contest the reclassification.

Under the department guidance, LEAs must monitor exited students for four years after reclassification. LEAs are responsible for developing their monitoring process. As part of a monitoring process, LEAs must evaluate the student's content knowledge and skill as a means to measure the student's ability to participate in a regular instruction program effectively.

**Alaska:** A student remains identified as an ELL until they obtain, on tier B or tier C of the approved state assessment, a composite score of 5.0 or higher and score of 4.0 or higher in each of the tested domains of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. See more in the state's 2017 [Guidance for English Learners \(EL\) Identification, Assessment, and Data Reporting](#), which may change as the state implements new accountability requirements.

Alaska requires districts to monitor the academic progress of pupils identified as an ELL for two years after their reclassification. A former ELL is not required to participate in the annual English language proficiency assessment

unless the district determines that a student's failure to make academic progress may be a result of a lack of English language proficiency and the pupil may need to be re-identified as an ELL.

**New Mexico:** State [code](#) directs the department of education to determine a composite score on an approved assessment that would allow a student to be reclassified and that a student must be monitored for two years after they exit an ELL program. In a [2017 letter](#) to districts and EL programs, the department of education states that to be reclassified, a student must obtain a 5.0 composite score on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 assessment.

The state department of education outlines the entrance and exit points from EL programs, including reclassification, in [process map](#). In 2017, the New Mexico Legislative Education Study Committee examined the state's ELL policy and guidance. Information and documents relating to their review are provided on their [website](#).

**Maine:** While Maine establishes that districts must define the exit process, the state issued guidance with information on what district can use as exit criteria. In a [2018 administrative letter](#), the department of education states that a student who scores 5.0 or above on the ACCESS assessment is considered proficient and may be exited from an ELL program. No other criteria can be used to qualify a student for exit from an ELL program.

Additional information and resources relating to Maine's laws and regulations of EL students are listed on the state department of education's [webpage](#).

**Utah:** Unlike the previous examples, Utah code leaves discretion for exit criteria for ELL students in the hand of LEAs. The only guidance the state provides is that LEAs should use a valid and reliable assessment to measure ELL student's English proficiency. We are not aware of any state-level requirement that LEAs use a specific assessment or select from a list of assessments for evaluating and exiting students.