ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Center for Assessment

Illinois English Learner Exit Criteria Development Principles and Guardrails Workshop

- Participant Booklet -



South Cook Intermediate Service Center, Chicago Heights, Illinois

November 5-6, 2026

Illinois EL Exit Criteria Workshop

South Cook Intermediate Service Center, Chicago Heights, Illinois

Zoom Links

Day 1: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85950215267?pwd=3U5xi8VFu7c071EV9u2jlVtCFbvUHJ.1&jst=1
Day 2: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85950215267?pwd=3U5xi8VFu7c071EV9u2jlVtCFbvUHJ.1&jst=1

Workshop Page

Illinois EL Exit Criteria Workshop — Resource Hub

Day 1 - Thursday, November 5

ID	Time	Session	Goals
—	**7:30–8:00**	**Arrival**	
1.1	8:00–8:30	**Welcome and Overview**	Review the context, goals, and agenda for the workshop
1.2	8:30–9:15	**Survey Findings**	Learn about findings from an initial constituent outreach survey conducted by ISBE and the pre-workshop participant survey
1.3	9:15–10:00	**Exiting EL Status in Illinois**	Reflect on insights from surveys and identify common themes with respect to EL services and exiting processes across Illinois settings
—	**10:00–10:15**	**Break**	
1.4	10:15–11:00	**Shared Design Priorities**	Develop a list of shared design priorities (assurances and safeguards) based on table discussions and a poster gallery walk
1.5a	11:00–11:30	**Intro to Exit Rules**	Learn about the five core exit rules that exist
1.5b (Part 1)	11:30–12:00	**Review & Discuss Exit Rules (Part 1, Rules 1 & 2)**	Evaluate the risks and benefits of each exit rule, starting with the first two
—	12:00–12:30	**Lunch**	
1.5b (Part 2)	12:30–1:30	**Review & Discuss Exit Rules (Part 2, Rules 3, 4, and 5)**	Evaluate the risks and benefits of each exit rule, continuing with the last three
1.5c	1:30–2:00	**Connecting Exit Rules to Shared Design Priorities**	Test each exit rule against the shared design priorities identified in the morning
—	**2:00–2:15**	**Break**	
1.6	2:15–3:45	**Exiting EL Services and Academic Performance**	Learn about the relationship between English language proficiency and academic achievement, reflect on local EL services, and suggest evidence needed to determine that Illinois's threshold is set appropriately
1.7	3:45–4:00	**Day 1 Review and Preview Day 2**	Review the Day 1 insights and preview Day 2
—	**4:00**	**Adjourn Day 1**	

Day 2 - Friday, November 6

ID	Time	Session	Goals
—	7:30–8:00	**Arrival**	
2.1	8:00–8:15	**Day 1 Review and Day 2 Preview**	Revisit the insights from Day 1 and preview Day 2
2.2	8:15–9:30	**Domain Exemptions**	Learn about the different types of exit options for students with domain exemptions with attention to comparability and fairness and an application of the Day 1 design priorities
—	**9:30–9:45**	**Break**	
2.3	9:45–10:45	**Alt ACCESS Populations**	Reflect on the characteristics of Alt ACCESS populations and EL services in local contexts and what this means about setting exit criteria for them with respect to the design priorities
2.4	10:45–11:30	**Workshop Close, Reflections, and Surveys**	Learn about the next steps following the workshop, share appreciations and take-aways, review the workshop through an exit survey, and complete the participant survey a second time
—	**11:30**	**Adjourn Day 2 / Workshop**	


HANDOUTS

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SESSION 1.3 · DAY 1 · 9:15–10:00

Participant Form: Exiting EL Status in Illinois

Surface what exit looks like in practice across Illinois settings, drawing on your constituent outreach.

Table # _____ **Name:** _____

A. Poster Synthesis

Choose as many aspects of the EL exit process / themes as you like and place them in a specific cell in this two-dimensional table. The rows correspond to how frequently this came up during the outreach and the columns reflect what the general consensus about this aspect of the work was.

		Effectiveness		
		Not Working	**Mixed Perceptions**	**Working**
Frequency	**Rare**			
	Sometimes			
	Often			

B. Gallery Walk

Visit the other posters. Note themes that stood out and how they compare with your table's poster. Use as many rows as you would like (you can add more below) but try to have at least one entry from each of the other posters.

Poster (Table #)	Aspects or Themes that Stood Out	Compared with My Table
		☐ Similar ☐ Different ☐ Missing from ours
		☐ Similar ☐ Different ☐ Missing from ours
		☐ Similar ☐ Different ☐ Missing from ours
		☐ Similar ☐ Different ☐ Missing from ours
		☐ Similar ☐ Different ☐ Missing from ours
		☐ Similar ☐ Different ☐ Missing from ours

C. Other Observations

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SESSION 1.4 · DAY 1 · 10:15–11:00

Participant Form: Shared Design Priorities

Turn hopes and concerns into a short list of shared design priorities: assurances to secure and safeguards to put in place.

Table # _____ Name _____

A. Initial Ideas

Assurances: "When setting exit criteria, it's really important that we ensure that…"	Safeguards: "When setting exit criteria, it's really important that we protect against…"

B. Table Discussion: Top Three in each Category

#	Assurances: "When setting exit criteria, it's really important that we ensure that…"	Rationale (optional)
1		
2		
3		

#	Safeguards: "When setting exit criteria, it's really important that we protect against…"	Rationale (optional)
1		
2		
3		

C. Mentimeter Review

Statements I Strongly Agree With

Important Aspect that are Missing

Wording I Would Change

If the final list could consist of only one assurance and/or one safeguard, mine would be:
Assurance: **Safeguard:**

D. Other Observations

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SESSION 1.5b · DAY 1 · 11:30–1:30 (Two Parts)

Participant Form: Structure of the Exit Rule (Guiding Question 1)

Weigh the risks and benefits of each exit rule option, given your professional experience and local context.

Table # _____ **Name** _____

A. During Presentation

Please consider your own setting or settings that are very similar to yours that you are intimately familiar with when reflecting on these rules.

ID	Exit Rule	Personal Orientation	Main Benefits	Main Risks
a	Composite score only	☐ More good ☐ Mixed ☐ More harm		
b	Domain score minimums	☐ More good ☐ Mixed ☐ More harm		
c	Domain minimum scores plus a minimum composite score	☐ More good ☐ Mixed ☐ More harm		
d	ACCESS score(s) plus evidence beyond ACCESS	☐ More good ☐ Mixed ☐ More harm		
e	Multiple pathways among (a)–(d)	☐ More good ☐ Mixed ☐ More harm		

B. Table Discussion: Cross-cutting Considerations

List areas of consensus and disagreement for core aspects of these rules that arose during the discussion; three starter examples are listed in the table.

Consideration	My Position and Rationale	Table Perspective
Do some **domains** matter more than others? Which domains and for whom?		
Should **secondary evidence sources** count? Which kinds and how?		
Should **external outcomes** matter? Which outcomes and how?		
Any other considerations?		

C. After Mentimeter Check

My Preferred Rule	What Might Change My Mind	Where the Room Differed from My Table

D. Other Observations

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SESSION 1.5c · DAY 1 · 1:30-2:00

Participant Form: Connecting Exit Rules to Day 1 Priorities

Test each exit rule against the shared design priorities (assurances and safeguards) set in Session 1.4.

Table # _____ **Name** _____

A. Rule-by-priority Matrix

Write short priority labels on the heading line of each column (A1–A3, S1–S3). Then rate each of the rules by their fit with the priority. In cases of weak fit, go to the table in section B of this form and provide an explanation. If you have time, feel free to also do this for cases with moderate fit.

ID	Exit Rule	Assurances			Safeguards			Overall Fit
		A1:	A2:	A3:	S1:	S2:	S3:	
a	Composite score only	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak
b	Domain score minimums	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak
c	Domain score minimums plus a minimum composite score	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak
d	ACCESS score(s) plus evidence beyond ACCESS	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak
e	Multiple pathways among (a)–(d)	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak	☐ Strong ☐ Moderate ☐ Weak

B. Exit Rule Misfit

Pick the rule-and-priority pairs that you identified as having a weak (and possibly also moderate) fit. Consider your setting as well as similar contexts that you are intimately familiar with. Provide an explanation of the misfit.

Rule ID (a-e)	Priority ID (A1-A3, S1-S3)	Explanation of Misfit	Implementation Suggestion

C. Table Discussion

Overall Best Fit

Implementation Suggestions

D. Other Observations

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SESSION 1.6 · DAY 1 · 2:15–3:45

Participant Form: How Will We Know If We Get It Right? (Guiding Question 4)

Consider what evidence would show that Illinois's new exit threshold is in the right place, and where learning opportunities are strong, on both sides of exit.

Table # _____ **Name** _____

A. During the Presentation

Noteworthy Research Finding or Illinois Data Point	Instinct or Assumption Challenged	Outstanding Questions

B. Table Discussion: Three Questions, Three Lenses

Jot your own ideas before and during the table discussion. Columns are the three lenses from the slides; rows are the three questions. Your table's note-taker will record the group's view.

Question	1. During EL status *Do EL services give students the full breadth, depth and rigor of grade-level standards?*	2. After exit *If a former EL student struggles, is it language? Would returning to EL status help?*	3. ISBE's role *How can ISBE support districts and educators to create these environments?*
A. Outcomes **What should we look at or for?** *For example: Test scores, achievement gaps, absenteeism, course access, graduation rates*			

Question	1. During EL status *Do EL services give students the full breadth, depth and rigor of grade-level standards?*	2. After exit *If a former EL student struggles, is it language? Would returning to EL status help?*	3. ISBE's role *How can ISBE support districts and educators to create these environments?*
B. Implementation and quality evidence **How do we know where the good opportunities are?** *For example: Teacher qualifications, implementation data, instructional materials and curriculum, course access*			
C. PD and TA needs **How do we make the "less good" opportunities better?** *For example: State technical assistance, professional learning, certification or PD requirements*			

C. Your Top Priorities

If you could ask ISBE and local districts to watch three things after the new threshold is set, what would they be?

Evidence or Action	Data Collection Approach (who collects, how often)

D. Share-out

Noteworthy Highlights from Other Tables

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SESSION 2.2 · DAY 2 · 8:15–9:30

Participant Form: Domain Exemptions (Guiding Question 3)

Work through the open policy choices for students with domain exemptions framed in terms of comparability and fairness and applying the Day 1 values and priorities.

Table # _____ **Name** _____

A. During the Presentation

Insights about Domain Exemptions	Insights about WIDA Guidance	Outstanding Questions

B. Implementation Considerations

At the table, discuss which of the rules that you have heard about for domain exemptions seems to be most appealing to you given the assurances and safeguards you have identified and the experiences from your local context.

ID	Exit Rule	Personal Orientation	Why this rule might work well	Why this rule might be problematic
1	Use the exit score	☐ More good ☐ Mixed ☐ More harm		
2	Use the student's average	☐ More good ☐ Mixed ☐ More harm		
3	Use the student's rank among all students	☐ More good ☐ Mixed ☐ More harm		
4	Set it through a standard setting	☐ More good ☐ Mixed ☐ More harm		
5	Reweight: use only the domains taken	☐ More good ☐ Mixed ☐ More harm		

C. Other Observations

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SESSION 2.3 · DAY 2 · 9:45–10:45

Participant Form: From ACCESS to Alt ACCESS (Guiding Question 2)

Decide whether the Day 1 exit rule direction also works for Alt ACCESS students, or whether separate criteria are needed.

Table # _____ **Name** _____

A. During the Presentation

Alt ACCESS Population	Key Differences between ACCESS and Alt ACCESS	Noteworthy Special Cases

B. Alt ACCESS Use Cases

Reflect on your local context and the Alt ACCESS population within it.

Characteristic	Explanation
Nature of the Alt Access population	
EL services available to population	
Learning environments available to population	
Common challenges for population	
Productive initiatives for population	

C. Assurances and Safeguards

Which assurances and safeguards would you want to see for this population?

Assurances	Safeguards

D. Program Monitoring

What are the "must-dos" for data collection and critical analysis, and how do they differ from monitoring for ACCESS?

Monitoring Aspect	Essential Aspects	Differences from ACCESS
Stakeholders involved		
Priority questions		
Data types collected		
Analyses conducted		
Most important evidence		
Signals to revisit the policy		
Other:		

E. Other Observations


SURVEY

IL Exit Criteria Workshop
Stakeholder Perceptions

André A. Rupp, Molly Faulkner-Bond, & Will Lorié
Center for Assessment

This deck contains only core information to save space for printing. The full deck is available digitally in the participant folder.

In-person Workshop, November 5-6, 2026, Session 1.2

Respondents

Two survey forms were developed in collaboration between ISBE and the Center to hear from stakeholders in the field and workshop participants about EL exit criteria and services.

Stakeholder Group	# of Respondents	%
Teacher or instructional support staff	248	53%
School leader, district leader, or support staff	221	47%
Family member, guardian, or other or community member	3	< 1 %
Total	**472**	**100**

These numbers fluctuate slightly across questions as most questions were optional so as to encourage respondents to complete the survey. Family responses are not shown in deck.

Core Comparisons (Teachers vs. Leaders)

Respondent Characteristics

Teacher and Staff Characteristics (Part 1)

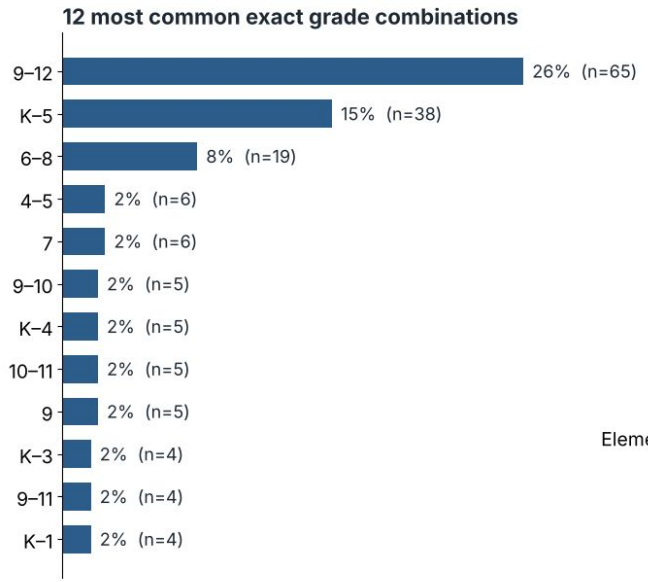
ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Classroom teacher		14.40%	36
ESL/ELD teacher		62.40%	156
Bilingual or dual-language teacher		7.20%	18
Special education teacher		1.60%	4
Instructional coach or other specialist		3.60%	9
Other (please specify)	Responses	10.80%	27
TOTAL			250

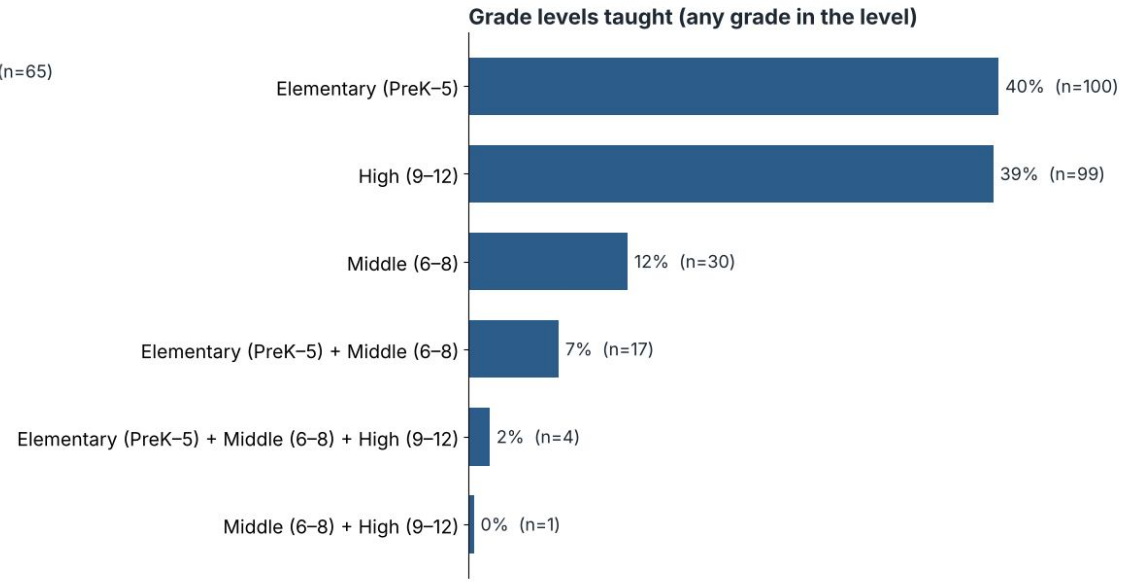
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
PreK	4.78%	12
K	33.86%	85
1	33.47%	84
2	33.07%	83
3	34.26%	86
4	33.47%	84
5	33.86%	85
6	15.94%	40
7	18.33%	46
8	16.73%	42
9	33.86%	85
10	36.25%	91
11	34.66%	87
12	31.08%	78
Total Respondents: 251		

Teacher and Staff Characteristics (Part 2)

Which grades do teachers and instructional staff teach or support? (T1_Q2, n = 251)

Select all that apply; each respondent counted once per pattern. Percentages of the 251 teachers who selected at least one grade. Elementary includes PreK.





Leader Characteristics

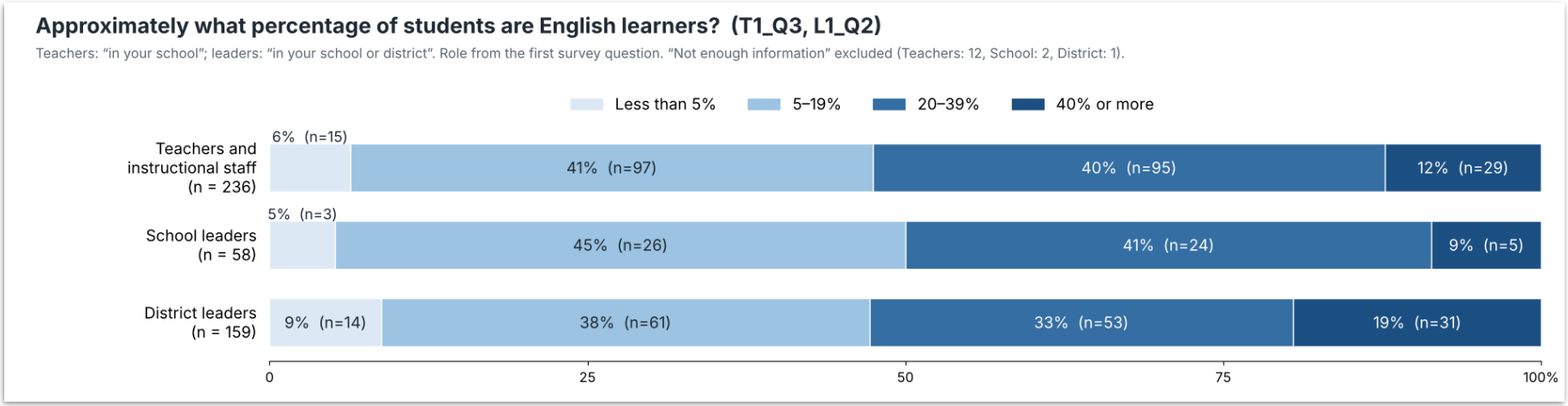
L1_Q1. Which best describes your role? Select one.

Answered: 221 Skipped: 320

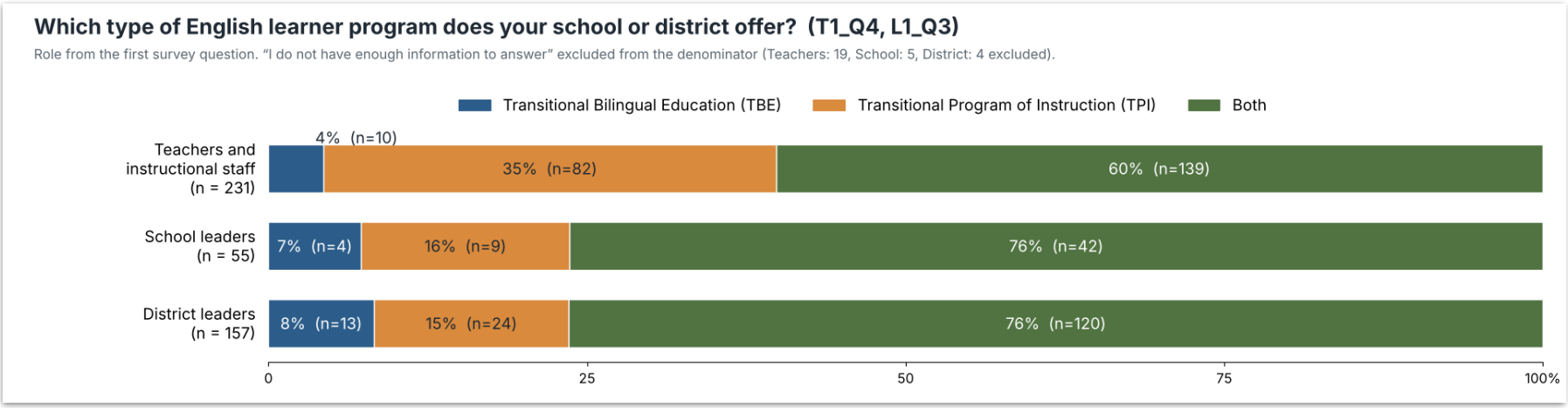
ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
Principal or assistant principal		12.67%	28
District EL/multilingual director or coordinator		42.08%	93
District special education director or coordinator		19.00%	42
Superintendent or assistant superintendent		18.55%	41
Other (please specify)	Responses	7.69%	17
TOTAL			221

Contextual Variables

Student Characteristics

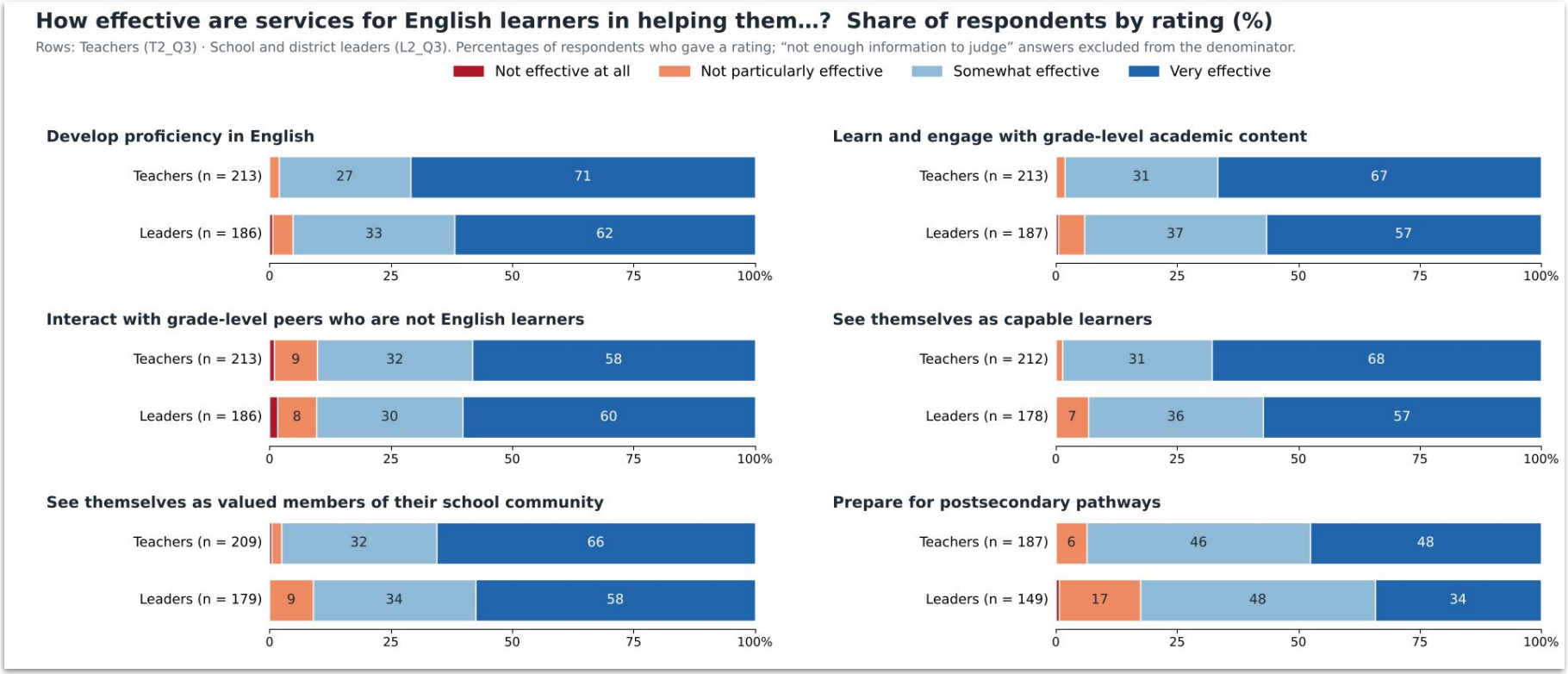


Programs Offered in Schools or Districts

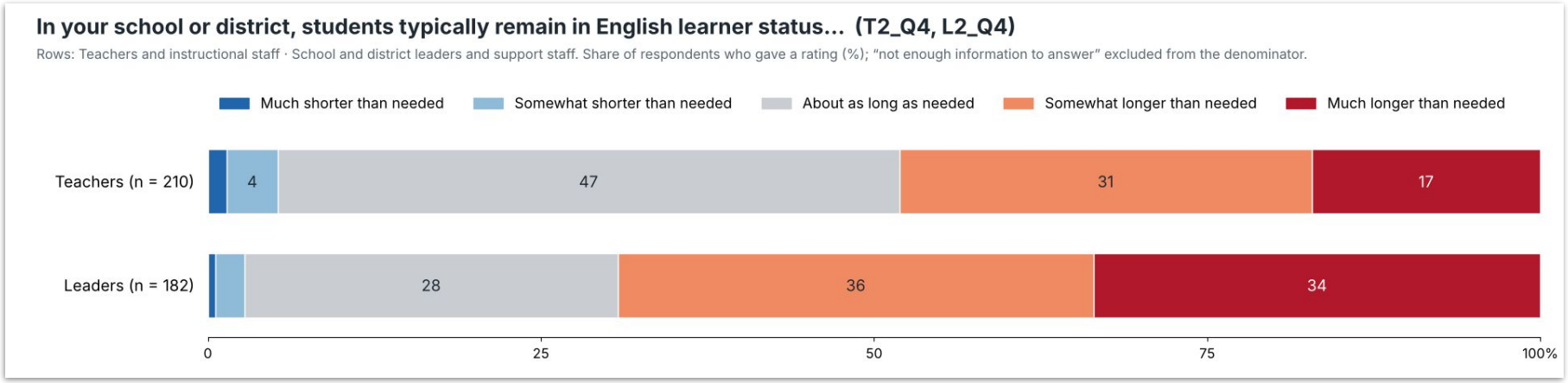


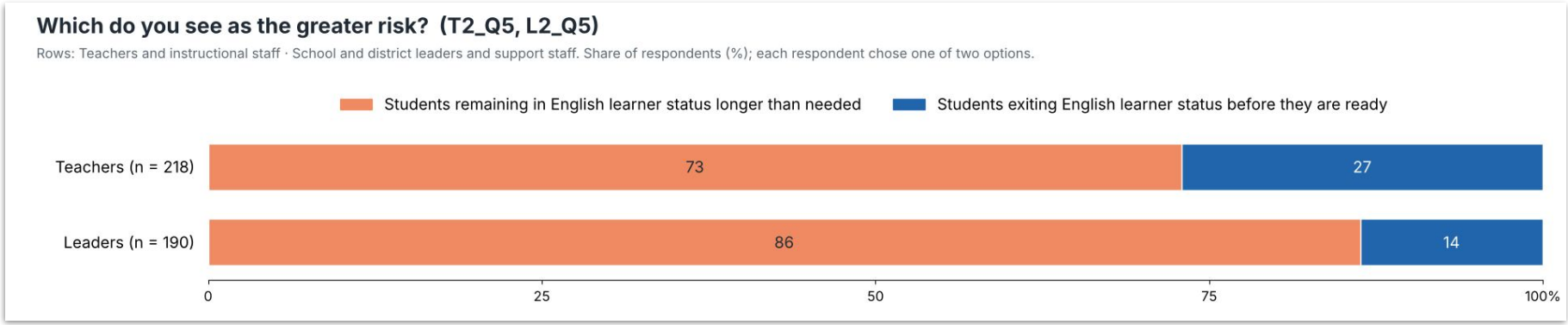
Effectiveness Ratings

Program Effectiveness (Part 1)

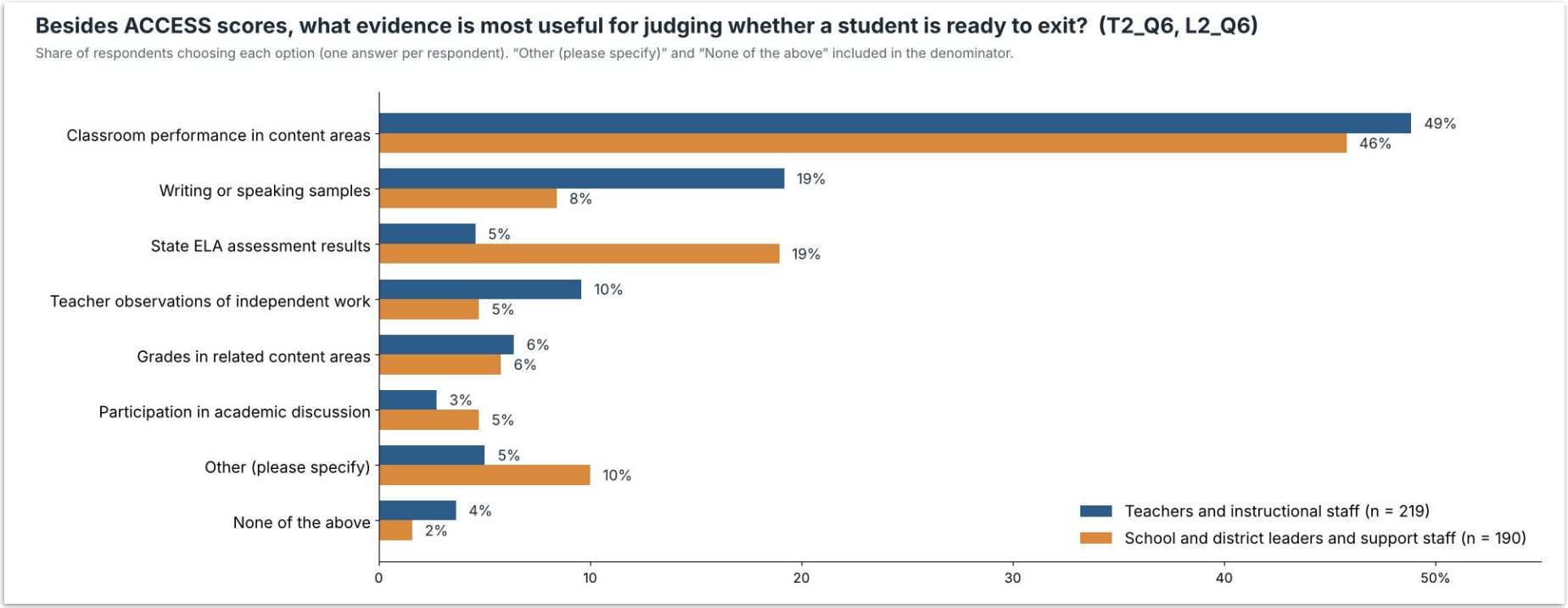


Program Effectiveness (Part 2)





Evidence about Proficiency

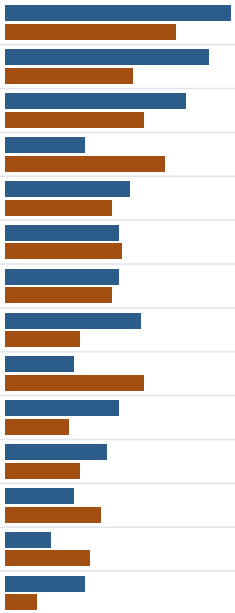


Open-ended Responses

Teachers vs. school and district leaders · T3_Q1 and L3_Q1

What is working well with how students exit EL status

■ **Teachers** (n = 117) ■ **Leaders** (n = 124) · % of substantive responses · right column: difference



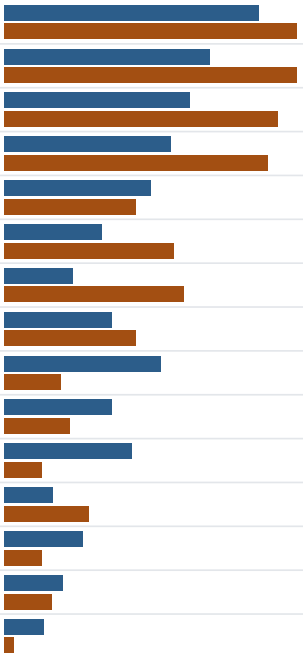
Exited students are ready and do well	17% · 13%
Targeted or small-group language instruction	15% · 10%
Students are monitored after they exit	14% · 10%
Staffing, endorsed teachers and resources	6% · 12%
Co-teaching or push-in support	9% · 8%
EL and general-education collaboration	9% · 9%
Access to mainstream classes, electives, advanced courses	9% · 8%
ACCESS gives a clear, objective basis for exit	10% · 6%
Little or nothing is working well	5% · 10%
ACCESS preparation, goal-setting and student effort	9% · 5%
Former ELs still get EL support after exit	8% · 6%
Data beyond the ACCESS score informs decisions	5% · 7%
A dedicated program model (ELD, sheltered, dual language)	3% · 6%
Students and families informed or celebrated	6% · 2%

Positive comments plus “little or nothing is working” · topics matched across two codebooks · themes overlap

Teachers vs. school and district leaders · T3_Q2 and L3_Q2

What is concerning about how students exit EL status

■ **Teachers** (n = 135) ■ **Leaders** (n = 140) · % of substantive responses · right column: difference



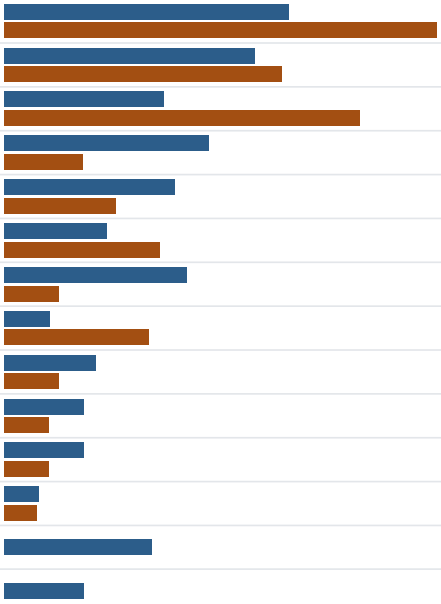
ACCESS understates classroom or IAR performance	19% · 22%
Students with IEPs or dual identification rarely exit	16% · 22%
Exit criteria are too high or unrealistic	14% · 21%
Long-term ELs stay in EL status for years	13% · 20%
Exit rests on a single score; multiple measures needed	11% · 10%
Exit harder in later grades or inconsistent across grades	7% · 13%
EL status limits electives, peers or student identity	5% · 14%
Too little support after exit	8% · 10%
Some students exit too early	12% · 4%
No concerns	8% · 5%
Test conditions, motivation or effort affect scores	10% · 3%
Scoring, reporting or speaking/writing design problems	4% · 6%
Staffing, scheduling or resource constraints	6% · 3%
Students narrowly miss the cut score	4% · 4%
Home language survey over-identifies students	3% · 1%

Comments given as concerns, plus “no concerns” · topics matched across two codebooks · themes overlap

Teachers vs. school and district leaders · T3_Q4 and L3_Q3

What ISBE should consider when setting new ACCESS exit criteria

■ **Teachers** (n = 116) ■ **Leaders** (n = 119) · % of substantive responses · right column: difference p < .05 (unadjusted)



Use multiple measures, teacher judgment, academic results	22% · 33%
Students with IEPs or Alt ACCESS need different criteria	19% · 21%
ACCESS cut score is too high	12% · 27%
Long-term ELs are stuck in EL status	16% · 6%
Student backgrounds and program models differ	13% · 8%
Staff workload, resources, training or guidance	8% · 12%
Speaking/writing test design or scoring	14% · 4%
Exit is harder in middle and high school	3% · 11%
Support needed after exit; some exit too early	7% · 4%
Home language survey over-identifies students	6% · 3%
Keep the current criteria or maintain rigor	6% · 3%
Local flexibility or decision-making	3% · 3%
Student effort and test conditions affect results	11% · n/a
EL status restricts access to courses and schedules	6% · n/a

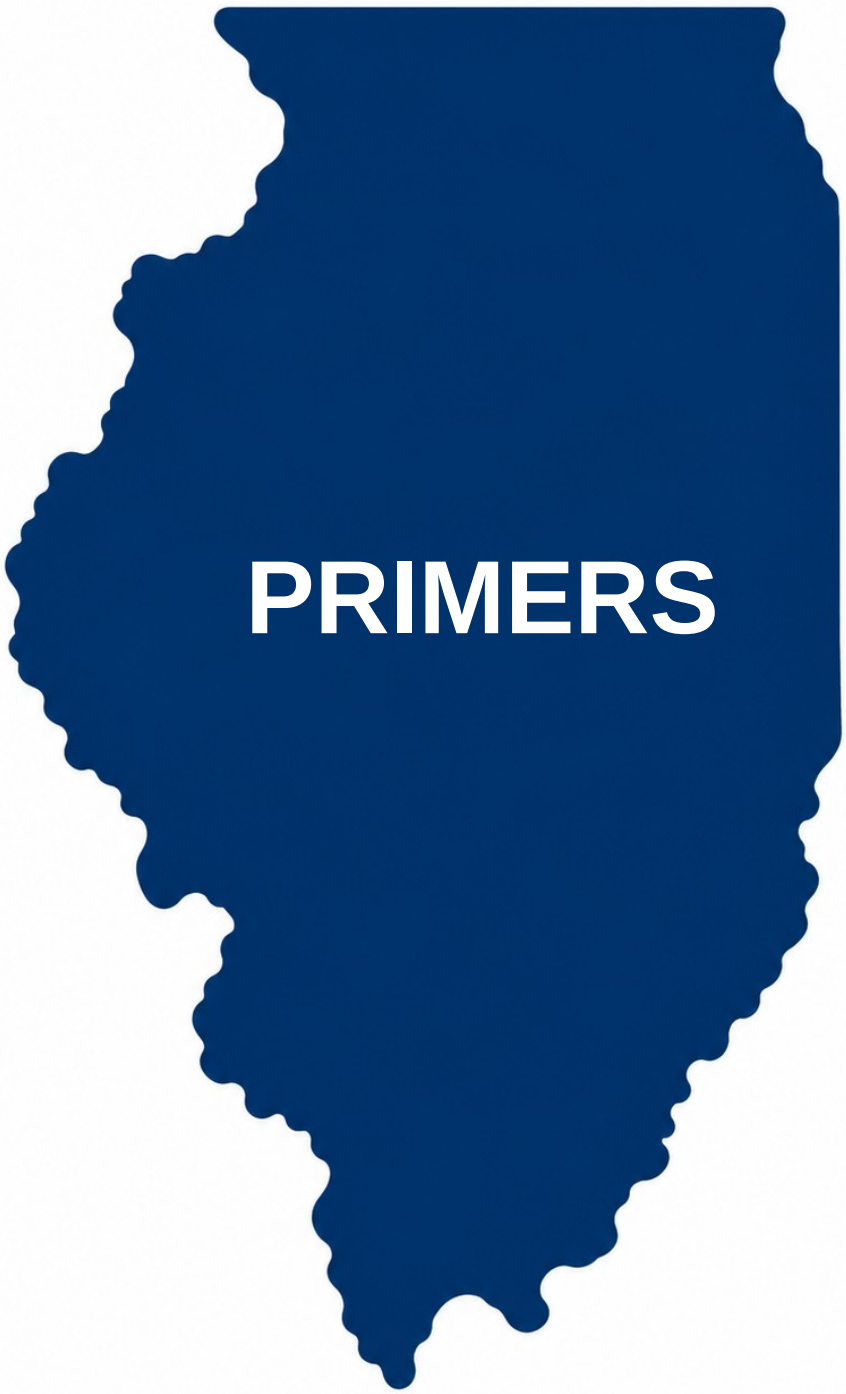
Teacher item: your school; leader item: school or district · topics matched across two codebooks · themes overlap · n/a = no leader code

IL Exit Criteria Workshop
Stakeholder Perceptions

André A. Rupp, Molly Faulkner-Bond, & Will Lorié
Center for Assessment

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In-person Workshop, November 5-6, 2026, Session 1.2


PRIMERS

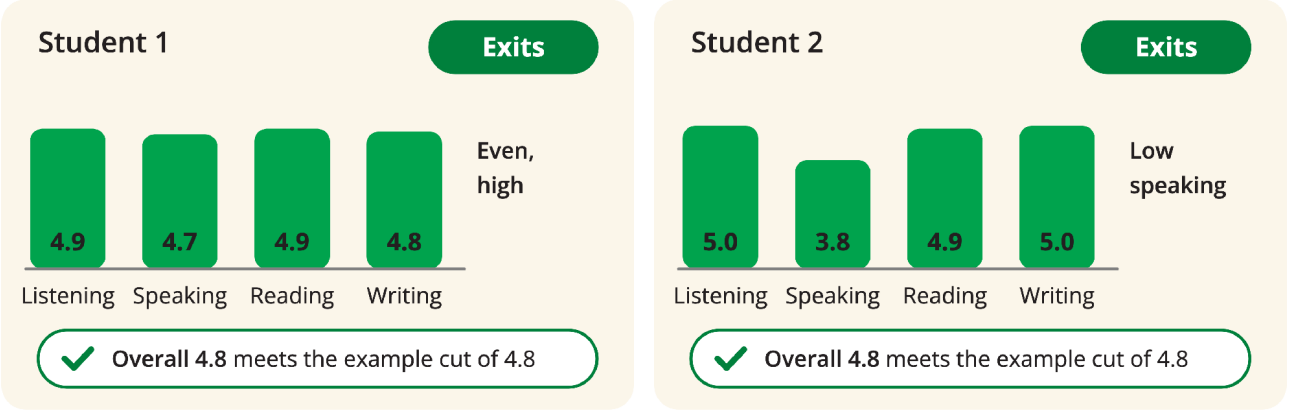
Option (a): Overall composite only

Exit-rule primer | Illinois EL Exit Criteria Policy Workshop, Session 1.5: How should the exit rule be structured?

The rule in one sentence. Students must reach a cut score on the Overall composite. Nothing else is required.

How it works

A student exits when the Overall composite reaches the cut score, whatever the four domain scores look like. A student below the cut score does not exit and is tested again the next year. In the example below, two students with the same Overall composite have different profiles, and both exit; all scores are invented.



Why this method might be attractive

One number, one cut score. The Overall composite pools every item on the test, so it is the most reliable score; each domain score rests on fewer items and is less reliable. The rule lets strength in one domain make up for weaker performance in another, which fits the view that language skills develop together.

What does it assume? That the Overall composite already gives each domain the right amount of say through its weights, where reading and writing count for 35% each and listening and speaking for 15% each. It also assumes one cut on that score can be set high enough to give confidence that a student is ready for grade-level work in English, without other information. The rule makes the most sense if students rarely have large gaps between domains, or if a gap in a low-weight domain is acceptable.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals; thresholds are set in February. State counts: Center scan of WIDA states (2025-26, updated Oct. 2026) and Oct. 2026 coding of other states from state documents (AI-assisted); a state counts under every rule type it uses. Sources: Carroll & Bailey (2015); Morales & Lepper (2024a, 2024b); WIDA (2026); Bond & Sato (2026).

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Strengths and trade-offs

	What it offers	What to watch for
Easy to explain?	One number and one cut score. Families can follow progress toward a single target.	One number hides differences between domains. Two students with the same Overall composite can have different skills, which may be hard to square with "proficient in English."
Easy to carry out?	Only one score to check, already on the ACCESS report: the simplest process for districts and state data systems (WIDA, 2026). One cut score to set and update when the test changes.	Students who cannot be tested in a domain have no Overall composite unless a rule fills the gap (Session 2.2). With one number deciding, a testing problem on the day, such as a faulty microphone, can decide a student's status.
Who exits?	Among rules that use only ACCESS scores, this has the fewest conditions, so at the same cut it exits the most students. In one state, 21% of fifth-grade ELs fell short under an Overall-only rule, versus 57% when all four domains had to meet a cut (Carroll & Bailey, 2015). It rests on the most reliable score, so chance plays the smallest role.	Students can exit with a very low score in one domain, most easily in listening or speaking. The cut score is the only safeguard, so its level matters: states with a single criterion set Overall cuts about 0.6 points higher, on average, than states with several (Morales & Lepper, 2024b).

Who else uses a rule like this? (2026)

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jurisdictions (50 states and DC) use an Overall-only cut as their standard route: 25 of 36 WIDA states, plus California and New York. Some also have a second route.

Has Illinois used it? Yes, it is the current rule (Overall 4.8, set in 2017).

Which WIDA states: Alabama, Alaska, Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin. Cuts range from 4.4 (South Carolina, Virginia) to 5.0 (Georgia, Indiana, South Dakota, Vermont, Wisconsin). Twelve of these states also have a second route (option (e)), and Georgia and Vermont add domain cut scores in kindergarten (option (c)).

Change over time: no state entered or left this group between 2024-25 and 2025-26. North Carolina likely lowered its cut from 4.8 to 4.5 (Dec. 2024); Alaska and New Hampshire are unconfirmed. Nationally, states using a single ELP criterion doubled since ESSA (12 in 2015, 24 in 2023), but that includes per-domain rules (Morales & Lepper, 2024a).

Other states: California (Overall level 4 on the ELPAC, the sole criterion from Sept. 2026) and New York (Commanding on the NYSESLAT; New York moves to WIDA ACCESS in 2026-27).

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals; thresholds are set in February. State counts: Center scan of WIDA states (2025-26, updated Oct. 2026) and Oct. 2026 coding of other states from state documents (AI-assisted); a state counts under every rule type it uses. Sources: Carroll & Bailey (2015); Morales & Lepper (2024a, 2024b); WIDA (2026); Bond & Sato (2026).

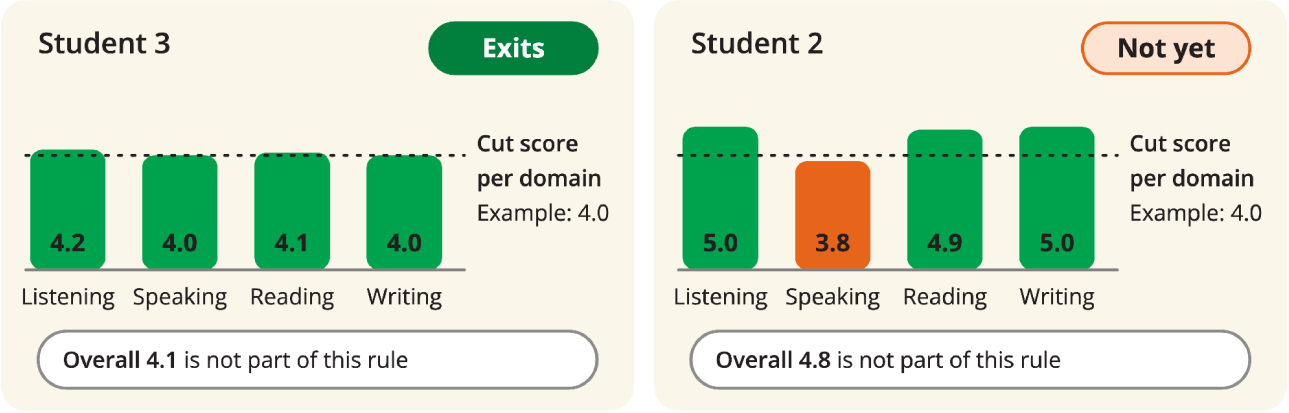
Option (b): Separate cut scores in each domain

Exit-rule primer | Illinois EL Exit Criteria Policy Workshop, Session 1.5: How should the exit rule be structured?

The rule in one sentence. Students must reach a separate cut score in each domain, or in each of selected domains. There is no Overall composite requirement (a domain profile).

How it works

A student exits only if every required domain is at or above its cut score. One low domain keeps a student in EL status, however high the other scores are, and strength in one domain cannot make up for weakness in another. A student who has not met every cut score is tested again the next year. In the example below, Student 3's Overall composite is modest but every domain meets the cut score, so Student 3 exits. Student 2 scores 5.0 or close to it in three domains but falls short in speaking, so does not; all scores are invented.



Why this method might be attractive

It guarantees a baseline in every domain. A student who exits has reached the standard in listening, speaking, reading and writing, with no trade-offs. The rule is easy to describe in terms of skills ("proficient in all four"). ELPA21 already defines proficiency this way: Level 4 or higher in all four domains (ELPA21, 2026-27).

What does it assume? That every domain matters equally, and that a student needs to reach a set level in each one, so strength in one domain should not make up for weakness in another. The rule sets aside the weights built into the Overall composite. It also assumes each domain score is precise enough to decide exit on its own, although each rests on fewer items than the Overall composite and is more affected by chance. With four chances to fall just short, a student who is ready can still be kept in.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals; thresholds are set in February. State counts: Center scan of WIDA states (2025-26, updated Oct. 2026) and Oct. 2026 coding of other states from state documents (AI-assisted); a state counts under every rule type it uses. Sources: ELPA21 (2026-27); Carroll & Bailey (2015); Sinharay et al. (2011); Morales & Lepper (2024a).

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Strengths and trade-offs

	What it offers	What to watch for
Easy to explain?	Plain language: "meet the standard in every domain." Matches how domain scores are already reported.	Several cut scores for families to track. A student can be strong overall and still not exit, or exit with a modest Overall composite, which may surprise people used to the Overall score.
Easy to carry out?	Uses domain scores districts already receive. No composite to calculate.	Four or more cut scores to set and keep aligned when the test changes. Students who cannot be tested in a domain need a rule (Session 2.2), and because this rule depends on every domain, it matters most here.
Who exits?	No domain is left behind, which guards against exiting too early.	Often the strictest rule: one score under its cut keeps a student in. In one state, requiring all four domains kept 57% of fifth-grade ELs in, versus 21% under an Overall-only rule, including 30% of academically high-performing ELs (Carroll & Bailey, 2015; that state's own test). Some subscores are too unreliable to decide on alone (Sinharay et al., 2011), so some ready students will be kept in by chance.

Who else uses a rule like this? (2026)

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jurisdictions (50 states and DC) use separate cut scores in each domain: all 10 ELPA21 states, plus Kansas. No WIDA state does; WIDA states that set domain cut scores pair them with an Overall cut (option (c)).

Has Illinois used it? No evidence found; ISBE to confirm.

ELPA21 states: all. On ELPA21, a student is Proficient only with Level 4 or higher in all four domains, and state exit criteria must include a Proficient summative result (ELPA21, 2026-27 guide). The ten ELPA21 states are Arizona (from 2026-27), Arkansas, Iowa, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee and West Virginia. Louisiana and Mississippi exit documents were not found, so the ELPA21 definition is assumed.

Other states: Kansas requires proficiency in all four KELPA domains, plus a team recommendation (lower confidence; to verify).

Change over time: none among WIDA states. Nationally, states using a single ELP criterion, Overall or per-domain, doubled since ESSA (12 in 2015, 24 in 2023). **[Placeholder: split between the two types]**

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals; thresholds are set in February. State counts: Center scan of WIDA states (2025-26, updated Oct. 2026) and Oct. 2026 coding of other states from state documents (AI-assisted); a state counts under every rule type it uses. Sources: ELPA21 (2026-27); Carroll & Bailey (2015); Sinharay et al. (2011); Morales & Lepper (2024a).

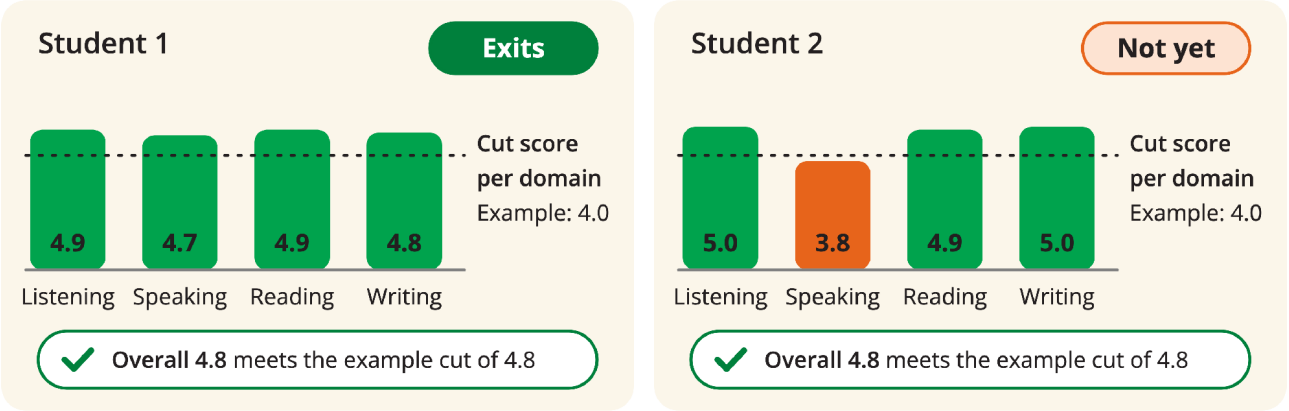
Option (c): Overall composite plus other ACCESS scores

Exit-rule primer | Illinois EL Exit Criteria Policy Workshop, Session 1.5: How should the exit rule be structured?

The rule in one sentence. Students must reach a cut score on the Overall composite and on one or more other ACCESS scores: individual domains, or other composites such as literacy (reading and writing), oral language (listening and speaking) or comprehension (listening and reading).

How it works

Students must meet **both** kinds of cut score to exit. A student who meets the additional cut scores but has an Overall composite below the cut does not exit. Neither does a student who meets the Overall cut but falls short on an additional score. A student who does not exit is tested again the next year. The additional score can be a domain or another composite, and can differ by state. In the example below, the additional cut scores are 4.0 in every domain, and Student 2 would exit under an Overall-only rule; all scores are invented.



Why this method might be attractive

A solid Overall composite, with no hidden weak spot. Because the Overall composite is a blend, a high score in one domain can make up for a low score in another. Adding a cut score on another ACCESS score reduces the chance that students exit with very uneven profiles.

What does it assume? That the Overall composite is a good summary but can hide a weakness that matters for grade-level work, so a particular skill, such as speaking or literacy, needs its own check. It also assumes the added score brings enough new information to be worth its lower reliability. All eight scores ACCESS reports (four domains and four composites) are different combinations of the same items on the same test, so they overlap and are partly redundant. The rule makes the most sense if many students near the cut have uneven profiles, or if certain skills matter more for success in grade-level classes.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals; thresholds are set in February. State counts: Center scan of WIDA states (2025-26, updated Oct. 2026) and Oct. 2026 coding of other states from state documents (AI-assisted); a state counts under every rule type it uses. Sources: Carroll & Bailey (2015); Sinharay et al. (2011); Morales & Lepper (2024a); WIDA (2026); Bond & Sato (2026).

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Strengths and trade-offs

	What it offers	What to watch for
Easy to explain?	Short to say: "a solid Overall composite and no weak spot." Families and educators can see which skill held a student back.	More numbers to understand, and a student with a high Overall composite can still not exit. A domain with its own cut score counts twice, once inside the Overall composite and again on its own, so it carries more weight than the composite gives it.
Easy to carry out?	Uses scores districts already receive on the ACCESS report. No extra testing or paperwork, and the same rule applies everywhere.	Every additional score has to be checked, and each cut score is one more to set and revisit when the test changes. Students untestable in a domain need a rule (Session 2.2).
Who exits?	Guards against exiting too early with a hidden weak spot. The choice of score matters: listening and speaking (15% each) are the easiest for the Overall composite to hide, while reading and writing already carry 70% of it.	At the same Overall cut, added cut scores can only keep exits the same or lower them. In one state, an Overall cut plus a low cut in every domain kept 33% of fifth-grade ELs in, between Overall-only (21%) and all-domains (57%) rules (Carroll & Bailey, 2015). If nearly all students near the cut already score 4.0 or higher in every domain, a 4.0 cut score rarely changes a decision.

Who else uses a rule like this? (2026)

11 of 51

jurisdictions (50 states and DC) use a rule like this: 10 of 36 WIDA states (8 in all grades, 2 in kindergarten only), plus Connecticut.

Has Illinois used it? Before 2017: Overall composite plus reading and writing cut scores (ISBE to confirm).

Individual domains (5): Idaho, Minnesota, North Dakota (all four), Utah (speaking), Florida (reading). **Literacy composite (3):** Colorado, Massachusetts, Wyoming. None of these uses the oral language or comprehension composites.

Kindergarten only (2): Georgia, Vermont. Colorado and Florida also add other evidence (option (d)).

Change over time: none found among these states from 2024-25 to 2025-26. Since ESSA, single-criterion states doubled (12 in 2015, 24 in 2023), but that counts criteria, not rule types (Morales & Lepper, 2024a).

Other states: Connecticut (LAS Links Overall level 4 or 5, plus reading and writing 4 or higher). Arizona used a rule like this on AZELLA through 2025-26 and moves to ELPA21 in 2026-27 (option (b)).

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals; thresholds are set in February. State counts: Center scan of WIDA states (2025-26, updated Oct. 2026) and Oct. 2026 coding of other states from state documents (AI-assisted); a state counts under every rule type it uses. Sources: Carroll & Bailey (2015); Sinharay et al. (2011); Morales & Lepper (2024a); WIDA (2026); Bond & Sato (2026).

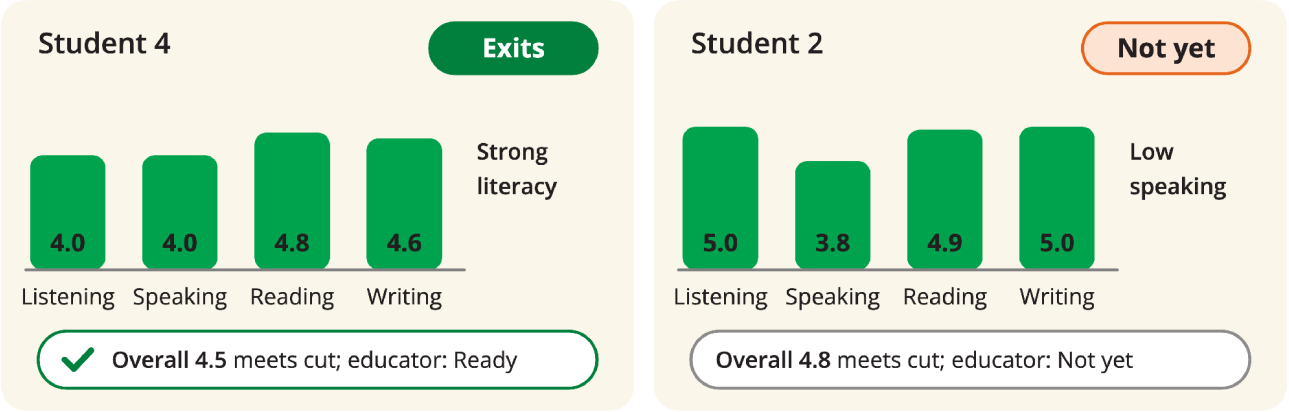
Option (d): ACCESS plus other evidence

Exit-rule primer | Illinois EL Exit Criteria Policy Workshop, Session 1.5: How should the exit rule be structured?

The rule in one sentence. Students must reach a cut score on ACCESS and also meet a standardized measure other than ACCESS.

How it works

The other evidence is a second requirement, collected the same way for every student. It can take different forms, and the choice can differ by state. Examples: an Overall composite of 4.8 plus a score above "below basic" on the state ELA test; an Overall composite of 4.5 plus standardized educator input; or an Overall composite of 4.7 plus one additional measure of writing. Two limits apply: the evidence must be standardized, and academic assessments other than ELA may not be used (2019 federal non-regulatory guidance; citation to be confirmed). A student who does not meet both is tested again the next year. In the example below, the rule is Overall 4.5 plus an educator rating of Ready; all values are invented.



Why this method might be attractive

It looks beyond one test on one day. Standardized evidence, such as educator input or ELA results, can capture what ACCESS misses, and it lets people who know the student contribute.

What does it assume? That ACCESS alone does not capture everything needed to judge whether a student is ready, and that a second, standardized measure adds that information. It also assumes the state can collect and score the evidence the same way in every district, so that it adds more information than error; the Overall composite is the most reliable ACCESS score, and evidence collected inconsistently can weaken the decision. If ELA scores are used, the rule needs a plan for grades with no state ELA test.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals; thresholds are set in February. State counts: Center scan of WIDA states (2025-26, updated Oct. 2026) and Oct. 2026 coding of other states from state documents (AI-assisted); a state counts under every rule type it uses. Sources: Morales (2024); Estrada & Wang (2018); Carroll & Bailey (2015); Morales & Lepper (2024a); WIDA (2026); Bond & Sato (2026).

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Strengths and trade-offs

	What it offers	What to watch for
Easy to explain?	The logic is easy to see: ACCESS plus one more thing, such as educator input.	More moving parts: what evidence counts, who decides and how. In two California districts, staff reported that parents and students did not understand the criteria (Estrada & Wang, 2018).
Easy to carry out?	Can build on work districts already do, such as rubrics and educator input, if the state standardizes it.	Adds burden to develop, apply and report the measure, and to train people to use it the same way; success depends on state capacity and funding (WIDA, 2026). ELA needs a plan for untested grades (kindergarten through grade 2, high school).
Who exits?	Can catch students whose ACCESS scores understate their English. Professional testing standards favor basing major decisions on more than one source of information (cited in Carroll & Bailey, 2015).	Added requirements lower exits at a given ACCESS cut: in four states, a required state test cut the share eligible from about 40% to about 7% (Morales, 2024). Practice varies: in two California districts, 2% to 33% of students who met all criteria were not reclassified (Estrada & Wang, 2018).

Who else uses a rule like this? (2026)

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jurisdictions (50 states and DC) use evidence beyond the ELP test in some form: 19 of 36 WIDA states, plus Arkansas, Kansas, New York and Texas.

Has Illinois used it? Not for general ACCESS exit as far as we know; ISBE to confirm.

Added requirement (5): Colorado (local body of evidence), Florida (ELA test), Montana (non-ELP assessment and committee), New Jersey (educator observation), Pennsylvania (language use inventory, scaled to the ACCESS score).

Within an alternative route (15): state test: Nevada, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Washington; portfolio or local evidence: Hawaii, Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin; committee or team review: Florida, Georgia, Indiana, New Hampshire (non-standard reclassification requests), North Dakota (district application with education-team consensus); not specified: Vermont (see option (e)).

Other states: Arkansas (professional judgment rubric), Kansas (team recommendation), New York (ELA test or Regents, in its second route) and Texas (STAAR reading and a teacher rubric). California dropped its additional criteria in Sept. 2026.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals; thresholds are set in February. State counts: Center scan of WIDA states (2025-26, updated Oct. 2026) and Oct. 2026 coding of other states from state documents (AI-assisted); a state counts under every rule type it uses. Sources: Morales (2024); Estrada & Wang (2018); Carroll & Bailey (2015); Morales & Lepper (2024a); WIDA (2026); Bond & Sato (2026).

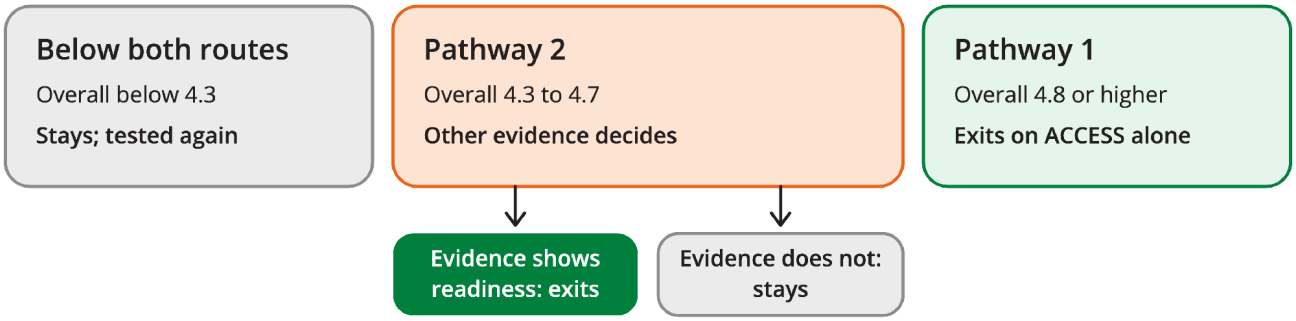
Option (e): Two or more of the above rule types

Exit-rule primer | Illinois EL Exit Criteria Policy Workshop, Session 1.5: How should the exit rule be structured?

The rule in one sentence. Students exit by meeting any one of two or more rules (pathways), and each pathway can be any of the rule types above.

How it works

Each pathway is a complete rule on its own. A student who meets any one pathway exits, and meeting more than one makes no difference. A student who meets none is tested again the next year. In the example below, Pathway 1 is an Overall cut score. Pathway 2 covers a range just below it, where other evidence can move a student over the line. Pathways could also differ in which ACCESS scores they use. All values are invented.



Why this method might be attractive

A second route for students who are close. Most students exit through a clear ACCESS-only route, and a second route catches students just below the cut who show readiness on other measures.

What does it assume? That any single rule will miss some students who are ready, most often those just below the cut, and that other evidence can identify them fairly. It also assumes the second route can be used the same way across districts, schools and students; when it is discretionary, use can vary and bias can enter. The second route needs everything the evidence rule (d) needs, plus rules about who may use it and when.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals; thresholds are set in February. State counts: Center scan of WIDA states (2025-26, updated Oct. 2026) and Oct. 2026 coding of other states from state documents (AI-assisted); a state counts under every rule type it uses. Sources: Douglas & Mislevy (2010); Mavrogordato & White (2017); Morales & Lepper (2024a); WIDA (2026).

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Strengths and trade-offs

	What it offers	What to watch for
Easy to explain?	Most students follow a clear ACCESS route, and the second route is easy to describe as a second look for students just below the cut.	Two or more rules to explain, and families may not know which route applied to their child. Each route needs a clear name and rationale.
Easy to carry out?	The ACCESS route is simple to apply, and the second route can build on work districts already do.	Data systems must check every route, and the state must decide who can use the second route, when, and how it is reported. Similar students already exit at different speeds across Texas regions (Mavrogordato & White, 2017).
Who exits?	Adds exits for students stuck just below the cut who show readiness on other measures, so fewer stay in EL status longer than needed.	Can only add exits, so the more generous the second route, the weaker the safeguard. Each added route lets in more students by chance: in one simulation, passing any one of five tests screened out about 72% of students not yet ready, versus about 94% when all five had to be passed (Douglas & Mislevy, 2010).

Who else uses a rule like this? (2026)

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jurisdictions (50 states and DC) have two or more routes to exit: 15 of 36 WIDA states, plus New York. In every case, the second route adds other evidence (also counted in option (d)).

Has Illinois used it? Not as far as we know; ISBE to confirm.

Which states: WIDA: Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin. Other: New York (Expanding on the NYSESLAT plus an ELA score). Second routes typically start 0.2 to 1.0 points below the regular cut. None of the second routes uses ACCESS scores alone.

Other ACCESS-only routes: separate criteria exist for students missing a domain (for example Colorado) and for Alt ACCESS (Sessions 2.2 and 2.3).

Change over time: Indiana added a route in 2025-26 and Rhode Island in 2024-25. New Hampshire and North Dakota were added after an October 2026 review of state guidance.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals; thresholds are set in February. State counts: Center scan of WIDA states (2025-26, updated Oct. 2026) and Oct. 2026 coding of other states from state documents (AI-assisted); a state counts under every rule type it uses. Sources: Douglas & Mislevy (2010); Mavrogordato & White (2017); Morales & Lepper (2024a); WIDA (2026).

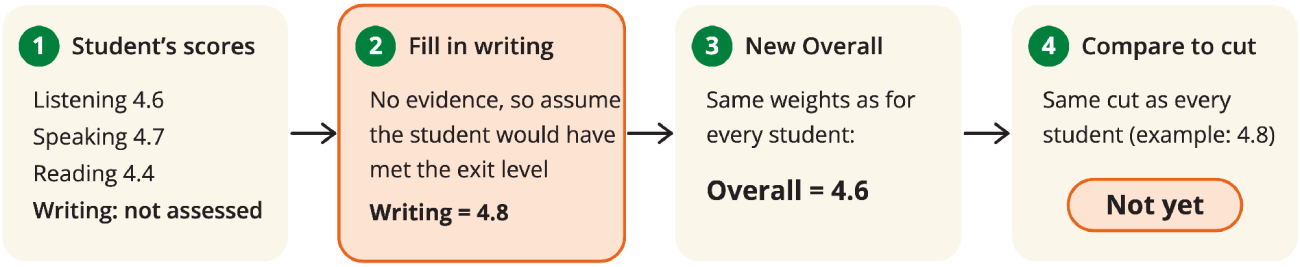
Approach 1: Fill the missing domain with the exit score

Domain-exemption primer | Illinois EL Exit Criteria Policy Workshop, Session 2.2 (Question 3: Domain exemptions)

The approach in one sentence. We have no evidence about the student's performance in the missing domain, so the state assumes the student would have met the exit level there, then calculates the Overall score as usual.

How it works

A student whose team has determined that a disability prevents assessment in a domain is assessed in the other domains, so the usual Overall score cannot be calculated. WIDA's 2019 report describes four approaches that fill in the missing domain and then calculate the Overall score the usual way; a fifth, WIDA's 2020 reweighting method, shares out the missing domain's weight instead. Every approach compares the result with the same cut as every other student. Approach 1 fills the missing domain with the lowest score that would count toward exit. In the example below, a student exempt from writing is credited with the exit level (4.8) in writing. All values are invented.



Why this approach might be attractive

An untested domain cannot hold a student back. The student was not tested in this domain, so there is no evidence either way. Rather than let an unobserved score block exit, the approach assumes the student would have done well enough there, and lets the scores the student actually earned decide. It is the simplest of the four fill-in approaches to apply and explain (Porter et al., 2019).

What does it assume? That a student should not be kept in EL status because of a domain they could not be tested in, so the missing domain should count as met. The cost is that the filled-in score is likely higher than the student's observed domains would suggest, so some students may exit before they are ready (Porter et al., 2019). An Overall score built from three observed domains also rests on fewer items than a four-domain Overall score, so it is less reliable whichever approach is used.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals. Calculations use proficiency levels for readability; in practice they use scale scores and a lookup table, so results are approximate. Sources: Porter et al. (2019); WIDA (2026).

Strengths and trade-offs

	What it offers	What to watch for
Easy to explain?	One idea: "the missing domain counts as if the student met the exit level." WIDA's 2019 report calls it an easy concept to understand (Porter et al., 2019).	Families and educators may ask why a student gets credit for a test they did not take, or may see it as a free pass.
Easy to carry out?	The easiest of the four to apply (Porter et al., 2019). A state needs only the exit score for each domain and grade.	Needs a table that converts scale scores to proficiency levels, and a table of exit scores by domain, grade and cut. Both vary by state and must be rebuilt if the cut or the scale changes.
Who exits?	Lets students exit even when a domain cannot be assessed, so an exemption alone does not trap a student in EL status.	Likely to produce a higher score than the student's observed domains suggest (Porter et al., 2019), so some students may exit before they are ready.
How well does it fit the student?	Lets the scores the student earned carry the decision, and treats every exempted student alike in the missing domain.	For a student with low observed scores, the filled-in score is a boost that a four-domain student does not get; for a student with high observed scores, it could pull the Overall down.

Who else uses an approach like this? (2026)

1 of 51

jurisdictions (50 states and DC) found using this approach in public state documents (best guess, Oct. 2026).

Does Illinois have a policy? No. Illinois has not yet adopted an approach for students with an exempted domain (ISBE).

Which states: Minnesota. Stakeholders chose this approach in 2019, and the state also requires additional criteria before exit.

Caveat: Many states do not publish their method, and many WIDA states may rely on WIDA's 2025-26 calculation (approach 5) without saying so.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals. Calculations use proficiency levels for readability; in practice they use scale scores and a lookup table, so results are approximate. Sources: Porter et al. (2019); WIDA (2026).

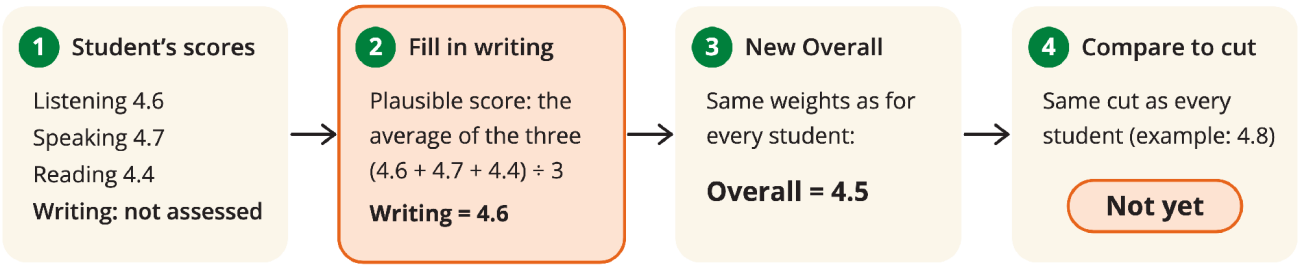
Approach 2: Fill the missing domain with the student's average

Domain-exemption primer | Illinois EL Exit Criteria Policy Workshop, Session 2.2 (Question 3: Domain exemptions)

The approach in one sentence. The state imputes a plausible score for the missing domain, the average of the student's observed domain scores, then calculates the Overall score as usual.

How it works

A student whose team has determined that a disability prevents assessment in a domain is assessed in the other domains, so the usual Overall score cannot be calculated. WIDA's 2019 report describes four approaches that fill in the missing domain and then calculate the Overall score the usual way; a fifth, WIDA's 2020 reweighting method, shares out the missing domain's weight instead. Every approach compares the result with the same cut as every other student. Approach 2 estimates the score the student would most plausibly have earned, based on how the student did in the other domains. In the example below, the average of the observed scores, 4.6, 4.7 and 4.4, rounds to 4.6 and becomes the writing score. All values are invented.



Why this approach might be attractive

It imputes a plausible score from the student's own performance. A student who is strong in the observed domains is treated as strong in the missing one, and a student who is weaker is treated as weaker. It is easy to apply and understand, and a state can calculate it with its own data (Porter et al., 2019).

What does it assume? That a student's scores across domains move together closely enough that the other domains predict the missing one. If they do not, the imputed score may be too high or too low (Porter et al., 2019). Typical scores also differ by domain within a grade, so a plain average mixes scores on different footings. An Overall score built from three observed domains is less reliable whichever approach is used.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals. Calculations use proficiency levels for readability; in practice they use scale scores and a lookup table, so results are approximate. Sources: Porter et al. (2019); WIDA (2026).

ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Strengths and trade-offs

	What it offers	What to watch for
Easy to explain?	Natural idea: "assume the missing domain looks like the student's other domains." Easy to understand (Porter et al., 2019).	A plain average can seem arbitrary when domains have different typical levels, and students with uneven profiles may be treated unfairly.
Easy to carry out?	Easy to apply, and a state can calculate it from its own data (Porter et al., 2019).	Needs a table that converts scale scores to proficiency levels, and rules for rounding. It must be rebuilt if the scale or cuts change.
Who exits?	Exit depends on how well the student did in the other domains, not on a flat assumption.	Can overshoot or undershoot: if domains are not highly correlated, some students exit who should not and others are kept in (Porter et al., 2019). One very low observed domain drags the filled-in score down.
How well does it fit the student?	Individualizes the filled-in score instead of using one value for everyone.	Assumes high correlation between domains, which may not hold for students whose disability affects one domain more than others.

Who else uses an approach like this? (2026)

2 of 51

jurisdictions (50 states and DC) found using this approach in public state documents (best guess, Oct. 2026).

Does Illinois have a policy? No. Illinois has not yet adopted an approach for students with an exempted domain (ISBE).

Which states: District of Columbia (fills in the rounded average scale score, which it calls re-weighting) and Massachusetts (average score method since 2020; its 2025-26 manual refers to a reweighted Overall, so it may now use approach 5). With one missing domain, this approach gives the same result as approach 5.

Caveat: Many states do not publish their method, and many WIDA states may rely on WIDA's 2025-26 calculation (approach 5) without saying so.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals. Calculations use proficiency levels for readability; in practice they use scale scores and a lookup table, so results are approximate. Sources: Porter et al. (2019); WIDA (2026).

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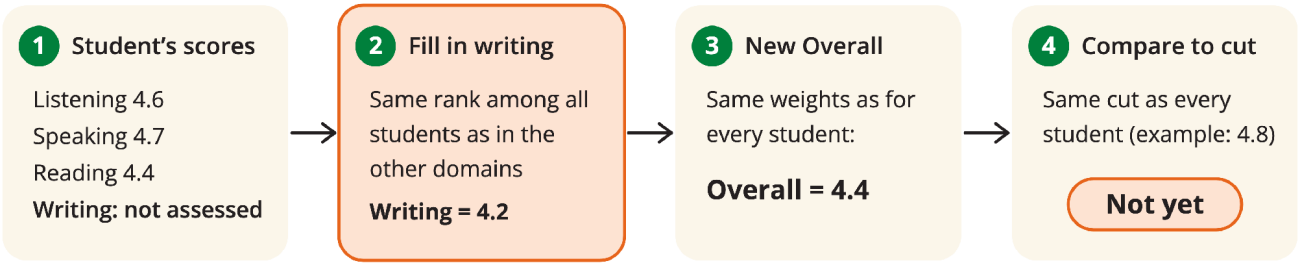
Approach 3: Fill the missing domain using the student's rank

Domain-exemption primer | Illinois EL Exit Criteria Policy Workshop, Session 2.2 (Question 3: Domain exemptions)

The approach in one sentence. The state imputes a score for the missing domain at the same place among all students as the student's other domains, then calculates the Overall score as usual.

How it works

A student whose team has determined that a disability prevents assessment in a domain is assessed in the other domains, so the usual Overall score cannot be calculated. WIDA's 2019 report describes four approaches that fill in the missing domain and then calculate the Overall score the usual way; a fifth, WIDA's 2020 reweighting method, shares out the missing domain's weight instead. Every approach compares the result with the same cut as every other student. Approach 3 looks at where the student ranks among all students at the same grade in the domains they took. If the student is in the middle of the pack in listening, speaking and reading, the missing writing score is set at a middle-of-the-pack writing score; if near the top, at a near-the-top score. Because typical scores differ by domain, this can give a different value than a plain average. (Technically, rank is measured with z-scores.) In the example below, the student sits a little above the middle in the other domains, so writing is set a little above the typical writing score, giving 4.2. All values are invented.



Why this approach might be attractive

It imputes from where the student stands among all students. Domains have different typical scores at each grade, so the same number can mean a different place in the pack. Matching the student's rank, rather than the raw numbers, accounts for that (Porter et al., 2019).

What does it assume? That a student's rank in the domains they took predicts their rank in the one they did not, and that scores are spread in a typical bell-shaped pattern (Porter et al., 2019). It is the most technical approach, and few students qualify: in the one state studied, about 40 students had plans that exempted them from a domain, which may be too few for stable estimates. An Overall score built from three observed domains is less reliable whichever approach is used.

Strengths and trade-offs

	What it offers	What to watch for
Easy to explain?	The idea is natural: "same place in the pack as in the student's other domains."	The calculation (z-scores and standard deviations) is hard to explain to a general audience, and WIDA's 2019 report calls the approach complex (Porter et al., 2019).
Easy to carry out?	A state can compute it from its own data and its own grade-level score distributions.	Needs the spread of scores by grade and domain, two lookup tables and a rounding rule. Few students qualify, so the setup effort is large relative to use.
Who exits?	Tailors the imputed score to the student's rank, so students are neither credited nor penalized by a flat value.	Like approach 2, can overshoot or undershoot if a student's rank differs across domains. With few students, results may be unstable.
How well does it fit the student?	Adjusts for typical differences between domains.	Assumes a bell-shaped spread and that rank carries over between domains (Porter et al., 2019), which may not hold for students with disabilities.

Who else uses an approach like this? (2026)

0 of 51

jurisdictions (50 states and DC) found using this approach in public state documents (best guess, Oct. 2026).

Does Illinois have a policy? No. Illinois has not yet adopted an approach for students with an exempted domain (ISBE).

Which states: None found. WIDA itself used this method for its own reporting from 2018 to 2020, then replaced it with reweighting (approach 5).

Caveat: Many states do not publish their method, and many WIDA states may rely on WIDA's 2025-26 calculation (approach 5) without saying so.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals. Calculations use proficiency levels for readability; in practice they use scale scores and a lookup table, so results are approximate. Sources: Porter et al. (2019); WIDA (2026).

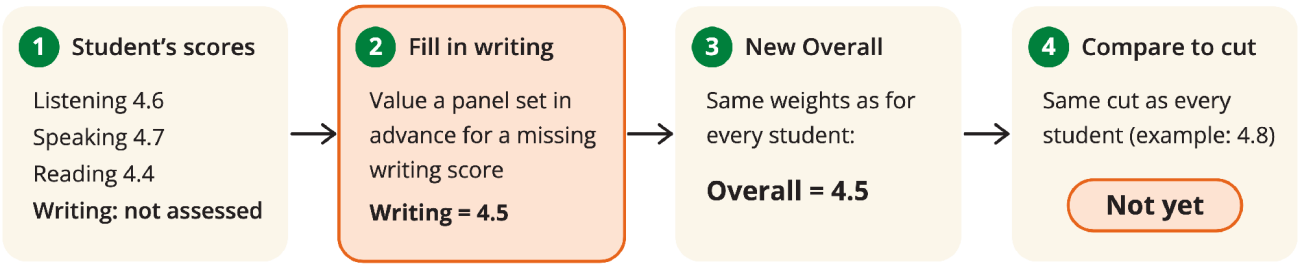
Approach 4: Set the imputed score through a standard setting

Domain-exemption primer | Illinois EL Exit Criteria Policy Workshop, Session 2.2 (Question 3: Domain exemptions)

The approach in one sentence. A panel of experts decides in advance, through a standard-setting process, what score to impute when a domain is missing; the same rule then applies to every exempted student, and the Overall score is calculated as usual.

How it works

A student whose team has determined that a disability prevents assessment in a domain is assessed in the other domains, so the usual Overall score cannot be calculated. WIDA's 2019 report describes four approaches that fill in the missing domain and then calculate the Overall score the usual way; a fifth, WIDA's 2020 reweighting method, shares out the missing domain's weight instead. Every approach compares the result with the same cut as every other student. Approach 4 convenes experts in English learners and in disability, who study WIDA's proficiency level descriptors and evidence about students and decide what score to impute for each missing domain, for example by domain and grade. They do not set a value for each student individually. In the example below, the panel's rule gives a writing score of 4.5. All values are invented.



Why this approach might be attractive

It draws on expert judgment. Experts who know English learners and students with disabilities can use WIDA's descriptors and knowledge of the student population, which score distributions alone cannot capture. Standard setting is a common method for setting cut scores on other tests and for other purposes.

What does it assume? That in-state experts can judge what score to assign better than a calculation from score distributions (Porter et al., 2019). No one, to our knowledge, has used standard setting for this purpose, and it would likely be harder than a typical standard setting: panelists usually judge what tested students know, but here they would decide scores for students who were not tested. It takes standard-setting expertise, is labor-intensive and needs substantial funding.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals. Calculations use proficiency levels for readability; in practice they use scale scores and a lookup table, so results are approximate. Sources: Porter et al. (2019); WIDA (2026).

Strengths and trade-offs

	What it offers	What to watch for
Easy to explain?	The process is easy to describe: "a panel of experts set the rule in advance."	The resulting rule can be hard to explain if the panel's reasoning is not transparent, and families may ask why the panel's value applies to their child.
Easy to carry out?	A common method for other tests and purposes, using local experts and local criteria.	Never tried for this purpose, so it is not a given that peer reviewers would accept it. Needs standard-setting expertise and substantial funding (Porter et al., 2019), and would likely need repeating if the test or cut scores change.
Who exits?	Experts can set values that reflect what students with disabilities can do, which could make exit fairer for them.	The direction depends on the panel. A lenient value could exit students too early; a strict one could keep them in.
How well does it fit the student?	Can be designed around the kinds of students affected, including different disabilities and domains.	Panelists judge scores for students who were not tested, a different and harder judgment than usual; quality depends on who is on the panel and how the process is run.

Who else uses an approach like this? (2026)

0 of 51

jurisdictions (50 states and DC) found using this approach in public state documents (best guess, Oct. 2026).

Does Illinois have a policy? No. Illinois has not yet adopted an approach for students with an exempted domain (ISBE).

Which states: None found. WIDA's 2020 report calls standard setting the most accurate option, but also the most difficult and costly.

Caveat: Many states do not publish their method, and many WIDA states may rely on WIDA's 2025-26 calculation (approach 5) without saying so.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals. Calculations use proficiency levels for readability; in practice they use scale scores and a lookup table, so results are approximate. Sources: Porter et al. (2019); WIDA (2026).

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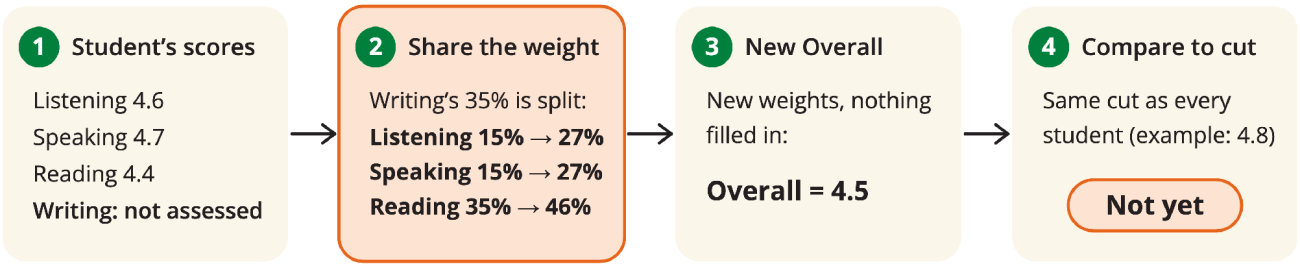
Approach 5: Reweight the remaining domains

Domain-exemption primer | Illinois EL Exit Criteria Policy Workshop, Session 2.2 (Question 3: Domain exemptions)

The approach in one sentence. The state does not fill in the missing domain; instead, its weight in the Overall score is split across the domains the student took, and the Overall score is calculated with the new weights.

How it works

A student whose team has determined that a disability prevents assessment in a domain is assessed in the other domains, so the usual Overall score cannot be calculated. WIDA's 2019 report describes four approaches that fill in the missing domain and then calculate the Overall score the usual way; a fifth, WIDA's 2020 reweighting method, shares out the missing domain's weight instead. Every approach compares the result with the same cut as every other student. Approach 5 is WIDA's own method. With one domain missing, its weight is split equally across the other three: if reading or writing (35%) is missing, the other of the two counts 46% and listening and speaking 27% each; if listening or speaking (15%) is missing, reading and writing count 40% each and the other oral domain 20%. With two domains missing, the weights match WIDA's existing composites (literacy, oral language, comprehension) or a 70/30 split. Beginning in 2025-26, a state can flag students exempt from up to two domains and WIDA calculates this score for them. In the example below, writing is missing; all values are invented.



Why this approach might be attractive

It avoids imputing a score at all. Some people are uneasy with making up a score for a domain the student did not take. This approach instead builds the Overall score from the information we have. WIDA calculates it, so it is the same everywhere and costs the state little, and in WIDA's simulations reweighted scores tracked students' actual Overall scores closely (Sahakyan, 2020).

What does it assume? That the domains the student took are a good stand-in for the one they did not. With one domain missing, an equal split gives exactly the same Overall score as filling in the student's average scale score (approach 2). The remaining domains also take on more weight and can play a different role in the exit decision: if writing is missing, reading counts 46% and listening and speaking 27% each; if listening or speaking is missing, reading and writing count 40% each. An Overall score built from three observed domains is less reliable whichever approach is used.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals. Calculations use proficiency levels for readability; in practice they use scale scores and a lookup table, so results are approximate. Sources: Sahakyan (2020); Porter et al. (2019); WIDA (2026).

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Strengths and trade-offs

	What it offers	What to watch for
Easy to explain?	One idea: "the missing domain's share is spread across the others." Weights fit in a simple table, and WIDA says it needs fewer assumptions and steps than the z-score method (Sahakyan, 2020).	Weights that change by student can be hard to follow, and the score looks like a regular Overall score even though one domain is missing.
Easy to carry out?	WIDA calculates it from 2025-26 once the state flags eligible students; Idaho and New Hampshire publish the weights or use WIDA's tool.	The state still needs a process for flagging and checking exemptions (Do Not Score code SPD); Idaho and DC require IEP or 504 documentation and a state review. Scores calculated outside WIDA's reports may not appear on the student's report.
Who exits?	Exit depends on the student's own scores. With one domain set to missing, reweighted scores correlated 0.97 to 0.99 with actual Overall scores (Sahakyan, 2020).	Reweighted scores ran slightly higher than WIDA's earlier z-score method; at a 5.0 cut, fewer than 2% of students would change exit status (Sahakyan, 2020).
How well does it fit the student?	Uses only the student's observed performance, with no made-up score.	Shifts weight toward the domains the student took: reading or writing can count 40-46% each, up from 35%. With reading and writing both missing, the correlation with actual Overall scores fell to 0.86 (Sahakyan, 2020).

Who else uses an approach like this? (2026)

3 of 51

jurisdictions (50 states and DC) found using this approach in public state documents (best guess, Oct. 2026). Any state using WIDA's 2025-26 calculation also uses it.

Does Illinois have a policy? No. Illinois has not yet adopted an approach for students with an exempted domain (ISBE).

Which states: Sometimes the state does it, and sometimes WIDA does it for the state. Idaho (publishes WIDA's weights in its July 2025 guidance), New Hampshire (uses WIDA's Less Than Four Domains tool, July 2025) and New Jersey (forms its own composite from the domains taken). Beginning in 2025-26, any WIDA state that flags exempt students (code SPD) gets this score from WIDA, often without saying so in state documents.

Caveat: Many states do not publish their method. Ohio and Tennessee (ELPA21) simply drop the exempt domain from their per-domain rule (Level 4 or higher in all non-exempt domains), so no Overall score is formed.

Draft for discussion. All scores and cut points are invented examples, not proposals. Calculations use proficiency levels for readability; in practice they use scale scores and a lookup table, so results are approximate. Sources: Sahakyan (2020); Porter et al. (2019); WIDA (2026).