



**CCSSO Framework on  
Supporting Educators to Prepare and Successfully Exit  
English Learners with Disabilities from EL Status**

## THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

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### **CCSSO Framework on Supporting Educators to Prepare and Successfully Exit English Learners with Disabilities from EL Status**

#### **COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS**

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**Note:** The ideas and information contained herein are those of the authors. Though there were many who contributed to the document, the authors take full responsibility for its content.

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## Purpose of the Framework

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA),<sup>1</sup> signed into law on December 10, 2015, requires that state education agencies (SEAs) establish standardized, statewide entrance and exit procedures for their English learners (ELs), including ELs with disabilities (ESEA, [Sec. 3113 \(b\)\(2\)](#)). For certain ELs with disabilities (i.e., ELs for whom it is determined on an individual basis that they are not able to be assessed in all four domains – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – of the English language proficiency (ELP) assessment, as well as ELs who are students with the most significant cognitive disabilities who may take an alternate ELP assessment) state exit procedures may include additional considerations that take into account the unique needs of this small group of ELs ([34 CFR § 200.6\(h\)](#)).

Providing local education agencies (LEAs) with additional considerations for certain ELs with disabilities may help educators meet provisions in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): “No qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity” ([ADA 1990](#)). States should ensure that all ELs with disabilities can meaningfully access and participate in processes for exiting EL status. This will also help LEAs meet the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirements to individualize student participation in state assessments in order to appropriately measure their achievement given the nature of their disabilities ([Sec. 1414\(d\)](#)).

As states are called to balance the individualization mandated in IDEA with the standardization required by ESEA, few have yet to include considerations for ELs with disabilities in their standardized, statewide procedures for exiting EL status ([Thurlow, Shyyan, Lazarus, & Christensen, 2016](#)). CCSSO is committed to ensuring every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education. In an equitable education system, personal and social identifiers such as race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or income are not obstacles to accessing educational opportunities; the circumstances children are born into do not predict their access to the resources and educational rigor necessary for success. Within such a system, all individuals attain sufficient knowledge and skills to pursue the college and career path of their choice and become active and contributing members of their communities. (Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Chiefs, CCSSO, 3). With this in mind, CCSSO has developed the following framework to support educators to prepare for and successfully exit ELs with disabilities from EL status. To that end, there are two sections included herein:

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<sup>1</sup> In this document, references to ESEA are to ESEA as amended by ESSA unless otherwise indicated.

Part I: Considerations for Exiting ELs with Disabilities from EL Status

Part II: Considerations for Providing Technical Assistance to Districts Serving ELs with Disabilities Who are Not Yet Able to Exit EL Status

Many of the recommendations offered below directly stem from or are further described in the [CCSSO English Learners with Disabilities Guide](#). We see the CCSSO guide as a critical starting point for the current work, and we recommend that the present framework and previous guide be used as companion documents.

### Who this framework is for

This framework is meant for SEA leaders responsible for creating and monitoring standardized, statewide procedures for exiting EL status. We believe that this framework would be particularly helpful when considering ELs with disabilities for whom disentangling ELP and disabilities may be particularly challenging, and who are therefore at risk of either inappropriately remaining in or prematurely exiting EL status. We do not offer guidance on how to determine whether English development is impacted by disabilities; this should be up to the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team to decide.

### What this framework is not

This framework is not a set of regulations that states are required to follow when developing procedures for exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status. The pathways to exit presented in this document include *recommended practices*. The document intends to offer considerations that states may consider as they develop their own procedures for exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status.

Additionally, it is beyond the scope of this framework to offer guidance on how states should set exit criteria for ELP assessments. We recommend that states work with assessment consortia if they use a consortium-based ELP assessment and stakeholders to establish criteria for their particular contexts.

This framework assumes that certain measures are already in place before educators make exit decisions for ELs with disabilities. These include the following:

- 1) Before any considerations for exiting EL status are made, the schools will have ensured that the EL with disabilities receives both special education and related services as well as EL services. The EL's special education and EL teachers will have collaborated to deliver those services in an integrated manner in the least restrictive environment. **IEP goals will have been written to reflect the integration of language learning and academic content goals for the EL with disabilities.**
  - This framework does not explicate how IEP teams will ensure ELs with disabilities receive both special education and EL services, and that these services are aligned. We encourage states to refer to Part Two of the [CCSSO](#)

[English Learners with Disabilities Guide](#) for recommendations on providing instruction and services to ELs with disabilities. This guide offers specific suggestions on how to ensure IEP goals integrate language objectives with individualized goals for ELs with disabilities. It also includes sample protocols for collecting data on instruction and services.

- 2) IEP teams are responsible for determining *how* individual ELs with disabilities are able to demonstrate their ELP. This framework does not explicate how IEP teams, which should include at least one expert on the student’s English language acquisition, decide what ELP assessment is best suited for the student (e.g., whether the student should take the general ELP assessment or an alternate ELP assessment, whether the student should participate in all or some of the domains). This framework should be referenced *after* such decisions have been made.
  - States might consider developing a tool or a set of discussion topics to guide IEP team decision-making around which approach to demonstrating ELP is most appropriate for a given EL with disabilities. For example, the Oregon Department of Education provides IEP teams with a [decision-making form](#) to guide discussions around which ELP domain(s) a given EL with disabilities can access.
- 3) IEP teams are also responsible for deciding what accommodations and accessibility considerations are appropriate for ELs with disabilities who take the general or alternate ELP assessment. There are many outstanding questions and concerns related to this topic. It is, however, beyond the scope of this framework to provide recommendations and guidance related to accommodations and accessibility. We recommend states refer to the [CCSSO Accessibility Manual](#) for additional guidance in this area.

### Additional considerations and challenges when using the framework

1. When developing procedures for exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status, **states must address both the individualization required in IDEA and the standardization mandated in ESSA**. We recommend that states keep this in mind as they consider adapting the framework to fit their contexts.
  - a. It is important that states offer specific, targeted training to personnel on how to gather and review evidence for certain ELs with disabilities for whom the entire general ELP assessment may not be valid. Such training would ensure that the process of exiting all ELs, including this small group of ELs with disabilities, from EL status is standardized and statewide.
2. **States’ ELP achievement standards** should guide the decision-making and interpretation of evidence related to exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status. Both special education and EL services provided to the student should have been aligned with these standards prior to decisions around exiting EL status.

3. LEAs may struggle to compose school-based teams that bring together all personnel necessary for exit decision-making. States report that ensuring both EL and special expertise are present on such teams can be especially challenging.
4. Even if EL and special education expertise are both present on the school-based teams, decisions to exit ELs with disabilities from EL status are often driven more by one side or the other. Ensuring that both experts have equal say in the exit decisions can be a challenge. Again, the [CCSSO English Learners with Disabilities Guide](#) offers resources for meaningful collaboration that may support LEAs in this area.
5. **We encourage states to emphasize the continuation of integrating supports for ELs with disabilities even after they are exited from EL status.** When monitoring ELs with disabilities who exited EL status, it is important that EL and special education experts maintain collaboration to develop and implement appropriate instructional supports and performance expectations for these students. Upon exiting EL status, students' IEPs should include several years of monitoring their English language development.

## Process for Developing the Framework

The development of this framework involved a series of activities to gather information and input from state education leaders and national experts. We invited all 50 states to participate in the development of this framework – 24 agreed to participate. We interviewed representatives from the 24 states on 1) their existing policies and practices on exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status, 2) challenges they and their LEAs encounter in this area, and 3) what recommendations they would like to see included in the framework. These education leaders had expertise on issues pertaining to ELs and/or special education.

We used these initial interviews to develop a draft framework for exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status. This framework was presented to the CCSSO Students with Disabilities Assessment Advisory Task Force and shared with national experts on language policy and assessment. These stakeholders offered feedback on the initial draft. We then revised the framework before convening a day-long meeting of state leaders and national experts in English language acquisition and special education. During this meeting, the participants provided input on the draft framework (i.e., what to keep, what to revise, and how it might be used).

We subsequently revised the document once more and shared it with all project participants for additional feedback. This included interviewees, meeting participants, and other national experts. The feedback we gathered was used for an additional round of revisions. We then presented the penultimate version of the framework to the CCSSO Students with Disabilities Assessment Advisory Task Force, the CCSSO English Learner Assessment Advisory Task Force, the English Learner Collaborative, and the Assessing Special Education Students Collaborative. Feedback from these groups led to a final round of revisions before the framework's publication.

## Organization of the Framework

This framework is divided into two parts. In part one, we offer considerations for exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status. These are organized by sub-groups of ELs with disabilities. The first group is ELs with disabilities who can access all four domains of the state’s general ELP assessment with or without appropriate accommodations and accessibility considerations. The second is ELs who are students with the most significant cognitive disabilities and who participate in an alternate ELP assessments. The third is ELs with disabilities who *cannot* access one or more domains of the state’s general or alternate ELP assessment. Vignettes depicting the application of considerations for hypothetical students in each group are included in the appendix.

In part two, we provide recommendations for states to consider when providing technical assistance to districts serving ELs with disabilities who are not yet able to exit EL status.

We wrote our recommendations to be rather broad so states can easily adapt them to fit their own contexts and needs. Again, everything presented in this framework is meant to serve as **considerations** for states as they develop their policies and practices for exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status.

**Table 1. Considerations for Exiting ELs with Disabilities from EL Status**

How Exit EL Status	ELs with disabilities must meet standardized statewide procedures for all ELs		
Required Exit Procedures	Proficient on English Language Proficiency (ELP) Assessment		
	<i>Participation in ELP assessment as decided upon by school-based interdisciplinary teams that include special education and English language acquisition staff</i>		
	General ELP assessment (with or without appropriate accommodations)	Alternate ELP assessment for those ELs who are students with the most significant cognitive disabilities	1-3 domains of the general or alternate ELP assessment for ELs that have a disability that precludes assessment of the student in one or more domains of the ELP assessment
Optional Additional Statewide Exit Procedures	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Additional objective criteria</b> (e.g., standardized assessments, language use inventory)</p> <p><i>Including additional objective criteria in standardized, statewide procedures for exiting EL status would intend to offer a more comprehensive view of the students’ ELP. This may be particularly helpful for ELs with disabilities for whom disentangling language learning from disabilities may be a challenge. Additional state procedures could include a requirement that <b>school-based collaborative teams meet to review the collected data based on the objective criteria and make determinations to exit EL status.</b> These additional criteria may not serve as a substitute for a proficient score on a valid and reliable ELP assessment.</i></p>		

## Part I: Considerations for Exiting ELs with Disabilities from EL Status

**Group 1:** ELs with disabilities who are able to access all domains (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing) of the state’s English language proficiency assessment with or without appropriate accommodations.

We recommend that for ELs with disabilities who are able to access all domains of the state’s English language proficiency assessment with appropriate accommodations as needed, which should be **the majority of ELs with disabilities** ([34 CFR § 200.6\(h\)\(5\)](#)), state procedures for exiting EL status should be the same as those applied to ELs without disabilities. State exit criteria must include a valid and reliable ELP assessment that tests all four language domains (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) to measure whether ELs, including ELs with disabilities, have achieved ELP ([34 CFR § 200.6](#)).

Pursuant to civil rights law, no EL may be exited without a proficient score on a valid and reliable ELP assessment, and other criteria may not substitute for this factor ([“Dear Colleague” Letter, 2015](#)). SEAs can include in their procedures for exiting EL status additional criteria beyond the ELP assessment. Such **additional criteria must be objective and statewide and may not substitute for a valid and reliable score on the ELP assessment**. In other words, although additional standardized processes may be included in a state’s exit procedures, **the state’s valid and reliable ELP assessment should be the major factor in determining whether to exit any EL, including ELs with disabilities, from EL status**. Additional criteria should supplement the ELP assessment to offer a more comprehensive view of the student’s ELP. These criteria may also help inform instruction and services for the EL (both if they remain in EL status as well as if they exit). If states do choose to incorporate additional evidence, such considerations should be applied to all ELs so that exit procedures are consistent across the state. Pages 13-15 of this document detail what these additional criteria might entail, as well as how they could be used in statewide exit procedures.

**Group 2:** For ELs with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are assessed using an alternate English language proficiency assessment.

The Title I, Part A assessment regulations require that all states “provide an alternate ELP assessment for each English learner covered under § 200.6(a)(1)(ii)—that is, those with the most significant cognitive disabilities—who cannot participate in the general ELP assessment even with appropriate accommodations” (34 CFR § 200.6(h)(5)). According to this legislation, **only ELs with the most significant cognitive disabilities – a very small segment of the overall EL population – should be eligible for the alternate ELP assessment**. The IEP team is responsible for determining whether the alternate ELP assessment is necessary for individual ELs ([U.S. Department of Education, 2014](#)).

In its June 28, 2017, letter to State Assessment Directors and State Title I Directors, the U.S. Department of Education clarified, “A State may develop alternate ELP achievement

standards for the alternate ELP assessment” ([U.S. Department of Education, 2017](#)). **We recommend that, in accordance with federal regulations, the alternate ELP assessment (which, at a state’s discretion, may have alternate ELP achievement standards and is aligned with challenging state academic standards) plays the primary role in decisions to exit ELs with the most significant cognitive disabilities from EL status.** As noted for group 1, states may include in their standardized, statewide exit procedures additional criteria that would supplement, not supplant, the alternate ELP assessment (see pages 13-15).

**Group 3:** For ELs with disabilities for whom it is determined on an individual basis that their disabilities preclude assessment in one or more domains on the general or alternate English language proficiency assessment and there are no appropriate accommodations for the affected domain(s).

Under the Title I regulations...

...If an English learner has a disability that precludes assessment of the student in one or more domains of the English language proficiency assessment required under section 1111(b)(2)(G) of the Act such that there are no appropriate accommodations for the affected domain(s) (e.g., a non-verbal English learner who because of an identified disability cannot take the speaking portion of the assessment), as determined, on an individualized basis, by the student’s IEP team, 504 team, or by the individual or team designated by the LEA to make these decisions under Title II of the ADA, as specified in [paragraph \(b\)\(1\)](#) of this section, a State must assess the student’s English language proficiency based on the remaining domains in which it is possible to assess the student ([34 CFR § 200.6\(h\)\(4\)\(ii\)](#)).

Pursuant to this regulation, **for a very small number of ELs with disabilities who are not able to access one or more domains and for whom there are no appropriate accommodations** (e.g., “a non-verbal EL who because of an identified disability cannot take the speaking portion of the state ELP assessment” [[34 CFR § 200.6\(h\)\(4\)\(ii\)](#)]), **ELP must be assessed using the remaining domains.** We recommend that states belonging to ELP assessment consortia look to their consortia for guidance on how to calculate composite scores and measure proficiency using the remaining domains on the general or alternate ELP assessment processes. States that are not part of any ELP assessment consortia should also develop procedures for determining a student’s proficiency level based on the domain(s) in which they are assessed.

As with groups 1 and 2, SEAs may include in their exit procedures for ELs in group 3 additional criteria that do not substitute the ELP assessment domains in which the students participate. See pages 11-13 for guidance on what the additional criteria might entail and how to use it for ELs whose disabilities preclude assessment in one or more domain of the general or alternate ELP assessment.

## Considering a Body of Evidence in Standardized Statewide Procedures for Exiting ELs with Disabilities from EL Status

According to professional standards for educational and psychological testing, exit decisions should not be made using a single test score ([AERA/APA/NCME, 2014](#); [Linguanti, Cook, Bailey, & MacDonald, 2016](#)). States may, therefore, consider including additional sources of evidence in their exit procedures for all ELs, including ELs with disabilities, that would strengthen the validity of ELP and exit determinations ([Liu, Thurlow, Lickteig, & Lazarus, 2017](#)). Consideration of additional sources of evidence may be particularly useful for ELs with disabilities for whom disentangling English language acquisition and language-related disabilities may be a challenge. We recommend that in such procedures, schools convene teams to review a body of evidence indicating the English proficiency of ELs with disabilities.

The purpose of considering a body of evidence would be to determine whether the ELP of an EL with disabilities is affecting the student's academic progress and performance. Some ELs with disabilities may have difficulty demonstrating their English proficiency skills on traditional standardized assessments, such as the alternate ELP assessment ([Liu et al., 2017](#)). They subsequently remain in EL status when it is really their disabilities that hinder their performance. Collecting multiple sources of information may help teams of educators evaluate whether it is ELP or other factors that are impacting the student's ability to access academic content.

In this way, the body of evidence can also help school-based teams determine appropriate instructional supports, services, and directions for ELs with disabilities, regardless of whether or not they exit EL status. As such, the primary aim of gathering and analyzing a body of evidence should not be to make exit decisions, but rather to effectively serve ELs with disabilities.

**Composition of the teams** – Teams might include some or all of the following members:

- At least one expert on the student's English language acquisition
  - For ELs with significant cognitive disabilities (group 2 or 3), this expert should be someone who is trained in how students with the most significant cognitive disabilities learn and develop non-native languages (e.g., bilingual speech language pathologist, special education teacher with endorsement or certification in English as a second language and in teaching students with significant cognitive disabilities). Preferably, this individual will have worked closely with the EL on their English language acquisition skills.
- At least one special education teacher or provider who works with the student
- At least one regular education teacher (if the child participates in general education)
- One or both of the child's parents or legal guardians
- Any requisite interpreters/cultural liaisons

- A representative of the local education agency
- At the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related service personnel as appropriate
- Whenever appropriate, the EL with disabilities

**Body of evidence to consider** – As part of their standardized statewide exit procedures, SEAs may consider adopting, in addition to the required proficient score on the general or alternate ELP assessment (or on the domains of these assessments in which the EL participates), a team-based review of a body of evidence indicating the ELP of all ELs, including ELs with disabilities. This body of evidence would be comprised of additional objective criteria that do not substitute a score of proficient on the general/alternate ELP assessment, but that offer a more comprehensive view of the student’s ELP and can be used to guide instructional decisions for students. Possible additional sources of evidence might include the following:

- General/alternate standardized or curriculum-based content assessments that
  - a) offer information on the students’ progress in the ELP domains that the students can access, and b) are used to monitor students’ progress toward IEP goals relevant to ELP
- Classroom observations of students’ language use
  - o In 2016, CCSSO released a [guidance document](#) on gathering and interpreting evidence of ELs’ classroom-based language uses. States might refer to this for recommendations on conducting classroom observations of ELs’ language use. This document was not created with ELs with significant cognitive disabilities in mind, however, some recommendations may be relevant to individual students.
- Language samples demonstrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills as outlined by the state’s general or alternate ELP standards
- Student work samples or portfolios
- Teacher input on students’ English language development progress
- Family input on students’ language development and use at home
- Data related to how the student was initially identified as an EL
- Review of EL services to ensure the student has received high quality English language development support, offered by an educator certified or endorsed in teaching English as a second language, while enrolled in public schools as an EL
  - o For ELs with significant cognitive disabilities, teams might also take into consideration the number of consecutive years that the student has received English learner services

- Assessments that evaluate students' proficiency in their home/primary language
- Language use inventories
  - o Example from [Pennsylvania Department of Education](#) (See Appendix A-C)
- Comparable peer group data
  - o Teams should determine whether there is appropriate comparable peer group data for ELs who are students with the most significant cognitive disabilities given how heterogenous and individualized the needs of these students can be

Note: Although the [CCSSO English Learners with Disabilities Guide](#) does not include tools and protocols specific to exiting EL status, some of the resources recommended for identification of ELs with disabilities may be relevant for exiting EL status as well. Some states also offer guidelines on considering a body of evidence that states might reference (e.g., [Colorado](#), [Nebraska](#), and [Pennsylvania](#)).

States should create discussion templates, questions, and rubrics that teams can use in their discussions of the body of evidence. State education leaders can also offer statewide professional development to team members on how to approach these discussions to **ensure procedures for exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status are standardized and statewide.**

#### An additional consideration for exiting ELs with cognitive disabilities from EL status

SEAs might also include in their procedures recommendations for school teams to examine trends in the alternate ELP assessment scores for individual ELs with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The teams might be guided to consider the extent to which these ELs have demonstrated growth on the alternate ELP assessment across years. The body of evidence collected could help the team determine the extent to which such trends in the alternate ELP assessment are related to ELP or other factors.

**Of particular importance is ensuring students have received high quality English language development instruction across multiple years, as any negative trends in alternate ELP assessment scores could be related to inadequate English language development services.**

#### Recommended adjustments and additional considerations for teams reviewing a body of evidence for ELs with disabilities whose disabilities preclude assessment in one or more domains of the general or alternate ELP assessment

- Teams might only consider aspects of assessments (e.g., standardized [alternate] assessments, curriculum-based assessments) that are related to the general or alternate ELP assessment domains that are accessible to the EL with disabilities.

- For classroom observations of students' language use, the team might focus on students' use of language relevant to the ELP assessment domains in which the child participates. However, ELs who do not participate in one or more domains of the general or alternate ELP assessment may still be able to demonstrate relevant skills in the classroom under non-standardized conditions ([Liu et al., 2017](#)). Documentation of such skills in other settings may be useful supplemental information. Teams should decide whether it is appropriate to consider classroom language use in the domains in which the EL is not assessed on the general or alternate ELP assessment.
- Teams might also gather evidence related to how the EL with disabilities uses any augmentative and alternative communication devices in a variety of contexts. Again, even if a child does not participate in the speaking domain of the general or alternate ELP assessment, documentation of these skills in other settings may be useful supplemental information.
- Any language samples collected might focus on the ELP domains that the EL is able to show given the nature of the student's disabilities (speaking, listening, reading, and/or writing).

In the appendix, we offer six vignettes to demonstrate what consideration of a body of evidence might entail for each of the three groups of ELs with disabilities.

### ***Group 1 Vignettes***

Vignette 1: Amanda, a third grade Hmong-speaking EL with speech language impairment who is exited from EL status

Vignette 2: Jaime, a seventh grade Spanish-speaking EL with specific learning disabilities who is not exited from EL status

### ***Group 2 Vignettes***

Vignette 3: Han, a sixth-grade Korean-speaking EL with intellectual disabilities who is exited from EL status

Vignette 4: Marcus, a second-grade Somali-speaking EL with multiple disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, who is not exited from EL status

### ***Group 3 Vignettes***

Vignette 5: Natasha, a kindergarten student from a Russian-speaking household who is blind and is exited from EL status

Vignette 6: Somaya, a high school non-verbal deaf EL with multiple disabilities who lives in an Arabic-speaking home and is not exited from EL status

## Part II: Considerations for Providing Technical Assistance to Districts Serving ELs with Disabilities Who are Not Yet Able to Exit EL Status

For ELs with disabilities who are unable to demonstrate proficiency in ELP and are, therefore, seemingly unable to exit from EL status using the state’s standardized statewide exit procedures, districts may look to states for guidance on how best to support those students’ English language development. We learned from our research activities that many districts struggle with capacity limitations related to providing instructional support and services to ELs with disabilities. States are currently working to build this capacity using a variety of approaches including a) coaching around individual student cases, b) offering training sessions, c) developing professional learning networks, and d) engaging in interdepartmental collaboration with their EL and special education colleagues to produce resources and guidance for districts and schools.

Based on the current work of states, we offer the following recommendations for providing technical assistance to districts. Many of these recommendations are further elaborated upon in the [CCSSO English Learners with Disabilities Guide](#).

### **Integrating and Aligning English Learner and Special Education Services**

1. Should SEA procedures for exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status include gathering a body of evidence, school-based teams can use the collected evidence to adjust services that individual ELs with disabilities receive. Because the evidence will reflect the students’ progress with both ELP and IEP goals relevant to ELP, conversations surrounding that evidence should lead to better integration and alignment of EL and special education services.
2. Districts must ensure ELs with disabilities receive *both* English language development and special education services. States might offer LEAs guidance on different service delivery models that would prevent the interruption or diminishing of either service. In particular, states may want to emphasize the importance of ensuring that special education services for ELs with disabilities do not get priority over EL services (special education should not “trump” EL services).
3. States might suggest that districts encourage school-level EL and special education service providers to incorporate special education supports into EL services and, in turn, incorporate second language acquisition and cultural integration supports into special education services. States could recommend that ELs with disabilities have individual language plans in addition to their IEPs; along similar lines, IEPs for these students could include sections to describe alignment between language objectives and IEP goals. Additionally, state technical assistance could include suggestions

for how educators might consider why students are not exiting EL status, especially if they are meeting their IEP goals. Such considerations should guide service development and implementation.

4. States may also recommend that districts offer guidance on how school-level staff can work with families to develop a better understanding of the students' language use at home. Based on this information, school staff could make language use and development more consistent across contexts for ELs with disabilities.

### ***Collaboration Between Special Education Experts and English Language Acquisition Experts***

1. States might suggest that districts emphasize to school-level staff the importance of special education and English language acquisition experts coming together to develop and implement integrated EL and special education services. Districts may want to gather evidence on the collaboration to ensure it takes place.
2. States can recommend that districts offer schools discussion guides to facilitate conversations between special education and EL staff on developing and implementing integrated special education and EL services. These guides would ensure that collaboration is meaningful (i.e., more than experts simply sitting in the same room).
3. States might help districts put together their own district-level collaborative teams that include EL and special education experts. These district-level teams would serve as a model to school-level collaborative teams. The district teams might also be able to partner with school-based teams to look at individual student cases and offer support for determining how to best serve ELs with disabilities.
  - o The [CCSSO English Learners with Disabilities Guide](#) includes additional suggestions for the composition of district and school-level collaborative teams.
  - o States could guide districts to ensure their teams, as well as school-level teams, meet regularly to create guidance and discuss specific concerns. States and districts would need to commit to providing resources and time for collaboration to take place.
4. States might similarly develop collaborative teams that can serve as a model to district-level teams.
5. States might also coordinate an ELs with disabilities parent advisory committee. This committee could consult with district and school-level collaborative teams about how to meaningfully serve ELs with disabilities in both their English language development and their progress toward IEP goals.

## Professional Development for School-Based Special Education and English Learner Staff

1. States might encourage districts to provide joint professional development sessions to school-based special education and EL staff on how to integrate EL and special education services. We recommend that states similarly provide joint professional development sessions to district-level special education and EL staff around integrating services for ELs with disabilities (see the [CCSSO English Learners with Disabilities Guide](#) for examples of state-level joint professional development).
2. States could offer guidelines to districts on professional development regarding how school-level EL and special education staff might collaborate to serve ELs with disabilities. States might model these trainings for district-level staff as well.
3. States may suggest that in addition to offering joint professional development sessions simultaneously to both EL and special education staff, districts could separately address second language acquisition with special education staff and special education instructional strategies with EL staff.
4. States could also support districts by establishing professional learning communities or peer learning networks through which EL and special education personnel around the state can learn from each other.

## Concluding Thoughts

The considerations within this framework are intended to be helpful to states as they continue to work toward meaningful solutions for ELs with disabilities – an important group of students for whom there are many questions and few answers. This framework is meant to facilitate meaningful problem-solving among educators who work hard daily to support their ELs with disabilities.

The considerations for exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status presented in this framework are intended to offer options and approaches for state education leaders developing their policies and practices. We recognize that state contexts are diverse. As such, there may be some aspects of the framework that are more appropriate for individual states than others. Our intent is to offer *approaches* to exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status that states can consider and refer to for ideas as they develop (or continue to develop) their own policies and practices.

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## VIGNETTE 1

**Amanda – an EL with Speech and Language Impairment**

Amanda is a third grade Hmong-speaking EL who was identified as having a speech and language impairment in preschool. After the results from the state ELP assessment are released in the spring, a collaborative team convenes to discuss Amanda’s eligibility for exiting EL status. The team includes Amanda’s parents, her third grade classroom teacher, the speech language pathologist, Amanda’s English language development teacher, the school’s English language development coordinator, the assistant principal, and a Hmong-English interpreter.

The speech language pathologist (SLP) leads the meeting. The team first examines Amanda’s ELP assessment results. She has met the state’s criteria for demonstrating proficiency as outlined in the ELP standards. The team also considers the additional sources of evidence that are part of the statewide standardized exit procedures. They see that she has consistently met grade-level content standards as indicated on her report cards. The SLP then shares assessment data as well as language samples. The SLP shows the team that Amanda has demonstrated consistent growth over time in her articulation and fluency skills in English, but she continues to struggle with semantics. She explains the instructional supports that she provides Amanda to help her meet grade-level writing standards. She has also been supporting the classroom teacher to regularly emphasize vocabulary development and word retrieval so Amanda does not rely too heavily on nonspecific terms, such as “things” and “stuff.” The SLP states that in her opinion, Amanda’s continuing need for writing support stems from her disability and not from her lack of ELP.

Amanda’s mother explains through the interpreter that she has noticed similar trends in Amanda’s language use at home. At home, Amanda communicates with her parents exclusively in Hmong, but she talks to her younger brother in English. They explain that she frequently cannot think of the exact word she wants to say, whether she’s speaking in Hmong or English. She often waves her hands in the air as she is thinking about the word. The team asks about Amanda’s reading and television or other media behaviors. The family shares that Amanda reads in English to her parents and brother every night. She watches television on Saturday mornings only; this is also in English. The Hmong radio station is on frequently at home in the evenings, so she regularly hears that language. As the parents are sharing, the SLP writes down their comments onto a form created by the state to document student language use.

The attention is then turned to the classroom teacher and the English language development teacher. Both share the student language use forms that they completed while observing Amanda in the classroom and which are part of the standardized statewide exit procedures. These forms show that Amanda participates in class during pair, small group, and whole class instruction. Very often her utterances are long and windy, as she struggles to find specific vocabulary words; nonetheless, her ideas are comprehensible and relevant to the conversation. Both the classroom teacher and the English language development teacher agree that Amanda is able to meet the ELP standards for speaking. The English language development coordinator then confirms that Amanda has received direct English language instruction for 60 minutes a day from a certified teacher consistently since kindergarten.

The team decides that altogether, the body of evidence indicates that Amanda’s difficulties stem from her disabilities, and that she is proficient in English. She is thus exited from EL status.

## VIGNETTE 2

### Jaime – an EL with Specific Learning Disabilities

Jaime is a seventh grade Spanish-speaking EL with specific learning disabilities. He was identified as an EL in kindergarten and for specific learning disabilities in the second grade.

Jaime’s school has a Language Acquisition Committee (LAC) that meets to discuss exiting from EL status all ELs at the school. The LAC includes the school’s principal, the English learner service coordinator, an English language development teacher, the bilingual literacy specialist, and the bilingual speech language pathologist. This team meets for an entire week after the ELP assessment scores are released to discuss students’ eligibility for exiting EL status. The LAC reviews the ELP assessment scores and the following additional sources of evidence, which are part of the standardized statewide exit procedures: a) standardized achievement assessment scores, b) progress reports, c) work samples, d) observation protocols of students’ oral language use in both L1 and L2, and e) peer comparison data (comparing to never-EL same age peers with same disability categories). For ELs with disabilities, the students’ IEP teams meet with the LAC to review the sources of evidence, as well as information on the students’ progress toward IEP goals that are relevant to ELP, and the ELs’ language use at home. This body of evidence is used to determine whether each EL with disabilities should be exited from EL status or not.

Jaime’s IEP team includes his mother, his special education teacher who works with him for one class period every day, his English teacher who also teaches Jaime during his English as a Second Language period, and his Spanish teacher. The joint team meeting (between the LAC and the IEP) for Jaime begins with a review of his ELP assessment results. He received a composite score that is above the state cut-off for proficiency, but his writing domain subtest is below the state’s criterion for exiting EL status. When the team looks at Jaime’s writing sample from the ELP assessment, they notice that many of his ideas are incomplete and his responses are short. This is consistent with the writing samples they gathered from Jaime’s teachers. In Jaime’s progress reports, teachers consistently comment that he is able to share his ideas orally, but putting them down in writing is a challenge. He therefore has not yet met the content standards for writing. The special education teacher confirms this trend. She shows a recent informal assessment she gave to Jaime to evaluate his progress on his writing goals. Even with the support of sentence frames and graphic organizers, Jaime has difficulty getting started with his writing. He appears to persistently struggle with producing complete sentences and full paragraphs in English. When he does write complete sentences, there are several syntactical errors that make deciphering his writing a challenge.

Jaime’s mother explains that she has trouble at home getting him to do any homework that involves writing, unless it is for Spanish. Jaime’s Spanish teacher then shows the group homework assignments demonstrating Jaime’s strengths in Spanish writing. He writes longer, more developed ideas and does not demonstrate the same errors that he shows in English. Jaime has received high marks on all of his Spanish tests and will be receiving a high grade in Spanish.

The team determines that Jaime’s difficulties in meeting the English writing standards are influenced by his developing English proficiency. They therefore decide not to exit him from EL status. He will continue to receive both EL and special education services with particular emphasis on writing.

## VIGNETTE 3

### Han – an EL with Intellectual Disabilities

Han is a Korean-speaking EL with intellectual disabilities in the sixth grade who participates in the alternate ELP assessment available in his state. When the ELP assessment scores are released, schools across the state gather collaborative teams that review a body of evidence to make exit decisions for all ELs, including ELs with disabilities. Han’s team includes his parents, his special education teacher who works with him in a self-contained classroom, the paraprofessional who works most closely with him, the EL coach who consults with Han’s special education teacher to support his English language development, the music teacher who teaches him when he is in specials classes with general education peers, Han’s Korean-English bilingual speech language pathologist, his occupational therapist, his physical therapist, the school psychologist, a Korean-English interpreter, and the principal.

The special education teacher leads the meeting. She has a form that was given to her by the district, and which is part of the standardized statewide exit procedures, that is meant to guide the discussion. The team is to review Han’s alternate ELP assessment scores, alternate standardized content assessment scores, and his progress toward his IEP goals. They begin by looking at Han’s alternate ELP assessment scores. In the state’s standardized, statewide exit procedures, ELs with significant cognitive disabilities who participate in an alternate ELP assessment may exit EL status when they 1) meet the state’s cut-off for proficiency, or 2) score within a particular band of scores just below this cut off for at least three consecutive years *and* meet all additional objective criteria included in the state’s exit procedures. Han’s composite score is just below the state cut-off for proficiency, but within the aforementioned band of scores. He has scored within this band for the last three consecutive years. This is despite his having received English language development services from his teacher with consultation from the EL coach across those years. In contrast, Han has demonstrated gradual growth over time on standardized alternate content assessments, as well as assessments used to monitor his progress toward IEP goals that are related to his ELP.

The special education teacher and related service providers then show everyone the data they gathered while evaluating Han on his progress toward his IEP goals over the last three years. Han has shown steady growth in all of the areas for which he is receiving specialized services. The bilingual speech language pathologist shares data demonstrating that his speaking and listening (expressive and receptive language) skills in both Korean and English have improved since she first started working with him. Han’s parents share that they notice he communicates with children in the neighborhood in either English or Korean. The music teacher confirms this, saying that he notices Han interacts with his general education peers in English and is able to participate in class activities with significant accommodations and supports. The English learner coach shares Han’s performance on formative assessments that demonstrate he has met his IEP goals related to the ELP domains of reading and writing as well. The only area where he has not yet met his goals related to writing is that he still needs help holding his pencil and physically writing, which is not relevant to Han’s ELP; this is something he will continue to work on with the occupational therapist.

Based on this body of evidence, the team decides that Han’s challenges are due to his disabilities and not his ELP. They therefore decide to exit him from EL status.

## VIGNETTE 4

### Marcus – an EL with Multiple Disabilities

Marcus is a second-grade Somali-speaking EL with multiple disabilities, including intellectual disabilities. He participates in the state’s alternate ELP assessment. In this state, a collaborative team that includes both English language acquisition and special education experts decides whether or not to exit ELs with disabilities from EL status. Marcus’ team includes his parents; his general education inclusion teacher, who is also the certified English as a second language teacher providing EL services to Marcus; the special education teacher, who is his case manager and offers both push-in and pull-out services; his Somali-English bilingual paraprofessional who works with him in the general education inclusion classroom; the speech language pathologist; the physical therapist; the occupational therapist; the adapted physical education teacher; and the school principal.

The state exit procedures stipulate that when considering potential exit for ELs with disabilities, collaborative teams must complete a rubric to evaluate the following information: 1) general or alternate ELP assessment scores, 2) state standardized content assessments in which the student participates, 3) district standardized content assessments in which the student participates, 4) data demonstrating students’ progress on their IEP goals relevant to developing English proficiency, 5) classroom observation protocols completed by both a certified English as a second language teacher and a special education teacher, 6) work samples, and 7) an observation protocol completed by the parents at home to assess the students’ home language use. With the exception of the state standardized content assessments that begin in third grade, all of the remaining elements are available for Marcus. The team reviews the information together.

The team observes that Marcus has not yet met the proficiency cut score that the state set for the alternate ELP assessment. He has, however, made some growth in his scores since kindergarten. This steady growth is evident in his alternate district standardized assessment scores as well, and also in his progress toward his IEP goals relevant to developing English proficiency. In particular, the special education teacher and speech language pathologist share that Marcus is making marked improvements in his English speaking and reading fluency. The classroom observation protocols indicate that Marcus has been interacting more in English with his peers in the general education classroom. He also responds with greater appropriateness to prompts and redirecting in both English and Somali when working with his paraprofessional.

The general education teacher, special education teacher, and paraprofessional have communicated with Marcus’ family regularly. The information his parents provide about his home language use are thus already familiar to them. The three also went on two home visits to Marcus’ house over the course of the year. They therefore were able to see for themselves how Marcus interacts with his family members. All notice that Marcus is making steady improvement in his expressive and receptive language skills in both English and Somali at home.

Marcus’ ELP assessment scores lead the team to decide not to exit Marcus from EL status. He will continue to receive EL services to build on his current momentum.

## VIGNETTE 5

### Natasha – an EL who is Blind and Cannot Read Braille

Natasha is a kindergarten student from a Russian-speaking household who was identified as an EL at the beginning of the school year. She is blind and has not yet learned to read braille. In Natasha's state, collaborative school-based teams decide whether to exit ELs with disabilities from EL status. The case manager leading the team is Natasha's special education teacher who pushes into Natasha's inclusive general education classroom every day. The other members of the team include Natasha's parents, an interpreter, her general education teacher, her English as a Second Language teacher, her classroom paraprofessional, and the assistant principal.

Per state policy, Natasha's collaborative team is to consider the following sources of evidence when making exit decisions for ELs with disabilities: 1) ELP assessment, 2) standardized achievement assessment scores, 3) assessments of students' progress toward their IEP goals that are related to ELP, 4) classroom observation notes that were completed by the students' case manager and an English language acquisition expert (in Natasha's case her ESL teacher) detailing the ELs' use of the English language, 5) language samples, 6) report cards, and 7) documentation of the initial EL identification process.

Natasha only participates in the listening and speaking portions of the general ELP assessment because there are no accommodations available that would make the reading and writing domains accessible to her. The first time she took the ELP assessment was in the fall of kindergarten, and she did not score proficient in speaking or listening. In the spring ELP assessment, Natasha scored above the proficient cut-off in both speaking and listening. The case manager, classroom paraprofessional, and general education teacher express confusion about why Natasha was identified as an EL to begin with. As documented in the classroom observation notes, she seems to interact with her peers and teachers without any difficulty. The only challenges they observe her experiencing are related to her blindness. For example, when Natasha is invited to play a game with a peer, she needs assistance navigating her way through the game; however, she is able to communicate effectively with her peer. The ESL and special education teacher also gathered language samples in speaking and listening that indicate Natasha's ability to communicate effectively with others in English.

The team members share that they never hear Natasha speak in Russian with her parents, although they do hear her parents use Russian with her. Natasha's parents explain that Natasha went to an English only preschool for two years. Their church is also all English-speaking. At home, the parents are trying to use more English to practice their own English skills. Natasha never uses Russian with them and she now ends up hearing mostly English. Upon reviewing the Home Language Survey completed at intake, the team notices that the parents only noted that the child spoke/heard Russian; they did not mention English. The team then wonders if Natasha's lower score on the ELP assessment in the fall was due to it being her first time taking such a test.

Academically, Natasha is performing at grade-level with accommodations on standardized early literacy and math assessments. Based on all of this information, the team decides that Natasha was improperly identified as an EL at the beginning of the year. They remove her from EL designation.

## VIGNETTE 6

### Somaya – a Deaf EL with Multiple Disabilities

Somaya is a non-verbal deaf EL with multiple disabilities who lives in an Arabic-speaking home. She is currently in the high school life skills program at her local school for the deaf. Somaya participates in only the reading and writing domains of the alternate ELP assessment.

In Somaya's state, a collaborative team that includes second language acquisition and special education experts is responsible for exiting ELs with disabilities from EL status. Somaya's team includes her special education teacher, parents, English as a second language teacher, occupational therapist, physical therapist, the paraprofessional who works most closely with her, and the school principal. The high school special education teachers at the school for the deaf focus on transition services (movement from school to post-school activities [e.g., vocational education, independent living skills, community participation]). For English as a second language, one teacher takes all four EL students with significant cognitive disabilities for 30 minutes a day, while the rest of the students have a joint read aloud class period. All high school special education teachers at this school, however, are certified to teach English as a second language and have received training in English language acquisition. As such, Somaya's life skills teacher also works with her on English development throughout the day.

The team uses a state-provided checklist to review Somaya's data and determine whether she should be exited from EL status. The first item on the checklist is Somaya's alternate ELP assessment scores. Somaya's performance on the reading and writing domains is below the state exit criteria for the alternate ELP assessment, indicating that she has not yet met the ELP standards. The team then examines Somaya's performance on the alternate standardized content assessments. They notice that she is below grade level and therefore has not yet fully accessed the state content standards with the EL supports she currently receives. Looking at her scores across multiple years, the group sees that Somaya's performance has gradually grown over her last three years of high school. This is true for her performance on the reading and writing domains of the alternate ELP assessment as well.

Somaya's special education teacher then shows the team her curriculum-based assessments, which demonstrate that Somaya has made progress on developing the transition services goals outlined in her IEP. She is able to more effectively use the Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices that the speech language pathologist provided and taught her to use, which is one of Somaya's IEP goals. She has also learned a number of new words in American Sign Language. Somaya's parents share that Somaya uses one of the Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices at home and it has been very helpful for them. Somaya can now point to icons telling them what she wants to eat or when she needs to use the bathroom. They feel that she has made great improvements in her communication skills.

Because Somaya appears to be gradually improving in her English reading and writing as well as in her communication skills, as evidenced by her ELP assessment scores demonstrating improvement but not yet proficiency, the team decides to keep her in EL status. She will continue receiving English as a second language services. The school will continue supporting and monitoring her English language acquisition to see if she can get closer to proficient on the alternate ELP assessment.





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