

Overview of the Spring 2015 New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT)

Spring 2015

INTRODUCTION

The Spring **New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT)** is designed to annually assess the English language proficiency of all **English Language Learners (ELLs)** enrolled in Grades K–12. The NYSESLAT is one component of the State’s compliance with federal laws that mandate annually assessing and monitoring the English Language proficiency progress of all ELLs. The results of the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT will drive the provision of ELL services in Bilingual Education and English as a New Language programs as of the 2015-2016 school year as prescribed in **Commissioner’s Regulations Part 154-2 and 154-3**. In the classroom, the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT results provide important information about each ELL’s English language development that help inform and drive instruction aligned to the **NYS Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)**, **Blueprint for ELL Success (BELLS)** and **Bilingual Common Core Initiative (BCCI)**, thereby ensuring that all ELLs are college and career-ready upon graduating high school in New York State.

An ELL’s performance on the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT indicates his or her level of English language proficiency relative to the linguistic demands of the grade-level classroom. These proficiency levels indicate the type of English language support each ELL needs to participate productively in the grade-level content-area classroom. Thus, a student who scores at the highest proficiency level, Commanding (formerly Proficient), on the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT has, with minimal support, met the linguistic demands necessary to meet the discipline-specific standards and is no longer considered to be an English Language Learner. However, a Former English Language Learner is entitled to services for two years after exiting ELL status.

HOW THE SPRING 2015 NYSESLAT IS CHANGING

The Spring 2015 NYSESLAT is changing in order to measure the linguistic demands of grade-level Common Core instruction delivered to ELLs. These changes, or “shifts”, in the assessment can be categorized as the following:

- Shift 1:** Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and New Language Arts Progressions
- Shift 2:** Performance levels
- Shift 3:** Integrated approach to modalities/global themes
- Shift 4:** Complexity: grade-level text for all levels, with content area foci
- Shift 5:** Instructionally relevant academic language

SHIFT 1: CCLS AND NEW LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRESSIONS

Shift 1 pertains to what the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT measures. Specifically, the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT measures the **Linguistic Demands** necessary to meet the **discipline-specific standards** at the corresponding grade-band level.

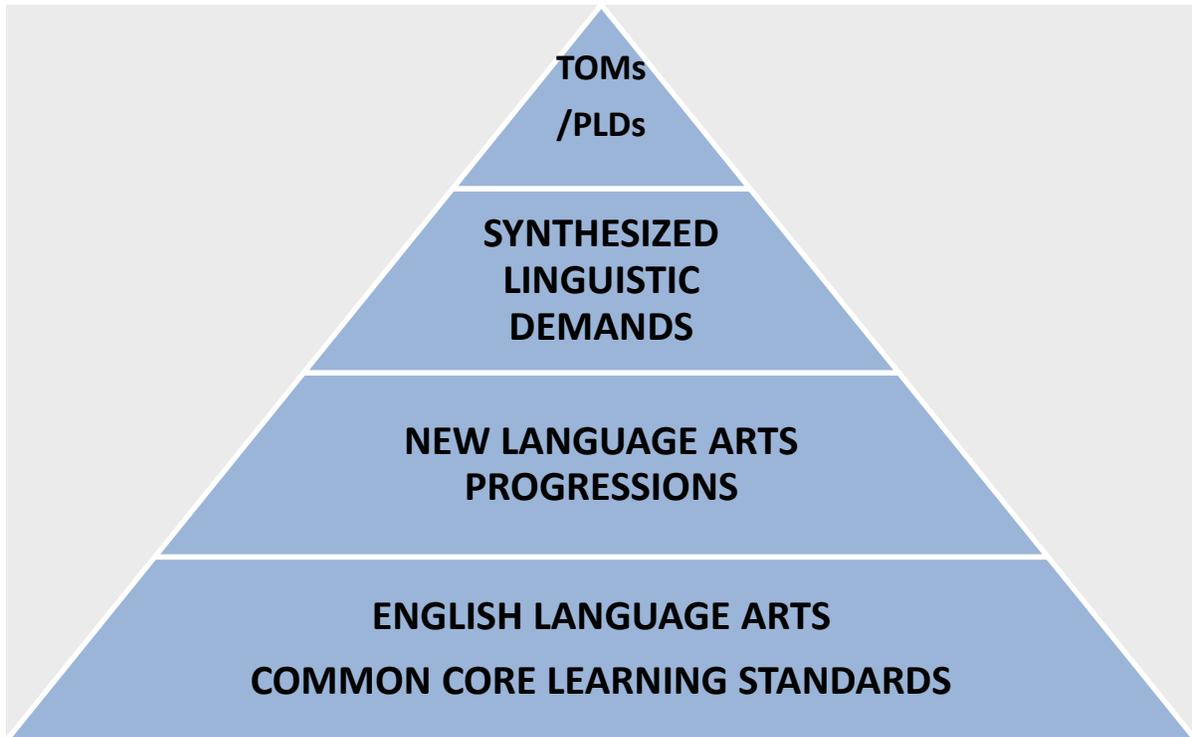


Figure 1: Graphic showing the relationship between the CCLS, BCCI New Language Arts Progressions, Synthesized Linguistic Demands, Targets of Measurement, and Performance Level Descriptions.

The Linguistic Demands are derived from the **New Language Arts Progressions** of the **Bilingual Common Core initiative**. In the classroom, the demands identify the words, phrases and forms of language that students need to understand and use in order to meet discipline-specific standards in K-12 across all four modalities (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing).

The Linguistic Demands are articulated for the purposes of assessment development as **Targets of Measurement (TOMs)**. TOMs are what New York State designates as the standards measured by the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT. Finally, to capture performance with the necessary level of precision, every grade-band level TOM has been delineated across five levels, which are known as the **Performance Level Descriptions (PLDs)**.

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

See the graphic above to help understand the relationship between the CCLS, the Bilingual Common Core Initiative's New Language Arts Progressions, the linguistic demands of the Progressions, the TOMs, and PLDs.

SHIFT 2: PERFORMANCE LEVELS

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

Entering (formerly Beginning)

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

Emerging (formerly Low Intermediate)

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

Transitioning (formerly Intermediate)

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

Expanding (formerly Advanced)

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

Commanding (formerly Proficient)

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

The continuum of English language proficiency as articulated by these performance levels is different from, though related to, the continuum of academic demands. Students at all levels of English language proficiency need appropriate scaffolds to meet discipline-specific standards in the content-area classroom. Note that because the NYSESLAT now measures the Common Core and New Language Arts Progressions a student who scored at one of the old four levels of proficiency may not necessarily score at the corresponding one of five new proficiency levels.

SHIFT 3: INTEGRATED APPROACH TO MODALITIES/GLOBAL THEMES

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

In a typical classroom, teachers recognize that a student’s language skills are integrated. Likewise, the Progressions and the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT integrate the modalities of Listening, Reading, and Writing. In the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT, this integration is created by what are known as **Global Themes**, which guide the passages and graphics on the assessment. The Spring 2015 NYSESLAT is designed to measure the language that is embedded in content, rather than the content itself. This content is reflected in informational and literary passages that a student would typically experience in the classroom. The Global Themes are broad enough to support passages and graphics across multiple disciplines/content areas. For example, within a hypothetical Global Theme of “Fish”, there could be listening items based on a stimulus about an aquarium, and reading items based on a passage about the life cycle of salmon. The intent of utilizing Global Themes is to provide students with an assessment experience that is cohesive and interconnected across modalities, and as such, similar to a relevant instructional experience provided by a well-developed unit of study.

SHIFT 4: COMPLEXITY: GRADE-LEVEL TEXT FOR ALL LEVELS, WITH CONTENT AREA FOCI

The CCLS for ELA/Literacy articulate a research-based need for increased text complexity across all grades in order to prepare students, including ELLs, for success in college and careers. The Spring 2015 NYSESLAT's reading passages are within the CCLS grade bands for text complexity¹. In addition, due to the integrated approach to content, the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT focuses on specific topics and/or aspects of instruction that students encounter in their content-area classes—for example, experiences with literary text in ELA, word problems in Mathematics, informational text in Science, and maps in Social Studies.

¹ See <http://achievethecore.org/page/642/text-complexity-collection> for more information about text complexity.

SHIFT 5: INSTRUCTIONALLY RELEVANT ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

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

GLOSSARY

Bilingual Common Core Initiative: Beginning in Spring 2012, NYSED launched the Bilingual Common Core Initiative to develop new English as a Second Language and Native Language Arts Standards aligned to the Common Core.

Blueprint for ELL Success: A plan meant to clarify expectations for administrators, policy makers, and practitioners; Provide a framework to prepare ELLs for success—beginning in Prekindergarten to lay the foundation for college and career readiness; Provide guidance, resources, and supports to districts, schools, and teachers; and Promote a better understanding and appreciation of Bilingual Education, English as a Second Language, and World Languages/Foreign Language Studies.

Commissioner’s Regulations Part 154-2 and 154-3: Two sections (definitions and school district responsibility, respectively) in a New York State document that describe services for pupils with limited English proficiency.

Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS): P–12 standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts that have been adopted and incorporated by New York State in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready no later than the end of high school.

Discipline-specific standards: In New York State, the discipline-specific standards include the Common Core Learning Standards for ELA/Literacy, the Common Core Learning Standards for Mathematics, the NYS Social Studies Learning Standards, and the NYS Science Learning Standards.

English Language Learners: Students who are learning English in addition to their home language.

Global Themes: An aspect of the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT test design in which questions representing each of the modalities are related to a common theme.

Linguistic Demands: Identifies the words, phrases and forms of language that students need to understand and use in order to meet the Common Core standards across all content areas.

New Language Arts Progressions (NLAP): Formerly the English as a Second Language Learning Standards, are meant to guide the language development goals and literacy levels for students of all language proficiencies to access grade level Language Arts content as described by the New York State CCLS.

Performance Level Description: A description of the content knowledge and skills students should display at each performance level on the state test.

Targets of Measurement: A synthesis of the Progressions, based on the CCLS, which are meant to be assessed by the questions of the Spring 2015 NYSESLAT. Note that the Targets of Measurement are for Spring 2015 NYSESLAT summative assessment purposes only. Classroom-based curriculum, instruction, and formative assessment should be based on the Progressions.