

Race to the Top Assessment Program
Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions
Addendum 2

D. Comprehensive Assessment Systems Grants

D-8a. What factors might a consortium consider when developing a plan for establishing a common definition of the term “English learner” in response to the selection criterion for Consortium Governance?

In the Comprehensive Assessment Systems competition, a consortium will receive points under selection criterion (A)(1) in part based on its governance plan. This governance plan should include the process and timeline for setting key policies and definitions for the assessment system, including a plan for establishing a common definition of “English learner.” An eligible applicant does not need to submit a common definition of the term “English learner” at the time of its application; however it should include a plan for developing such a definition. The plan will be considered in determining the extent to which the consortium’s proposed governance structure will enable the successful design, development, and implementation of the proposed assessment system (including the adoption of a common “English learner” definition).

Although the applicant’s proposal need not address implementation of its plan for developing a common definition of “English learner,” in developing and implementing a common definition of the term, applicants may wish to consider several factors. For example, applicants might consider the use of objective measures of English language proficiency (ELP) that do not include measures of whether a student is also meeting an academic achievement standard in an academic subject.¹ Consortium members might adopt common and consistent criteria for: (1) initial identification of students’ language-minority status through the use of common ELP “screeners” or ELP assessments; and (2) a definition of the English proficient level that designates a student as having attained English-language proficiency through the use of rigorous, standardized ELP assessments based on ELP standards that demonstrably correspond to the academic language and literacy standards in the common set of standards adopted by consortium members.

If consortium members plan to use different ELP assessments during implementation of a grant (if awarded), the consortium might consider developing: (1) evidence that all ELP assessments used by consortium members are comparable in technical rigor and result in the application of equally rigorous ELP standards that correspond to the academic language and literacy standards in the consortium’s common set of standards; (2) a concordance table that facilitates comparison of member States’ English-language proficiency levels -- for the overall composite and for each language domain (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) -- defined by each ELP assessment; and (3) a decision table that establishes comparable

¹ A consortium might examine the relationship of member States’ ELP assessments’ English proficiency levels -- particularly the level defined for English-language proficiency -- to academic achievement standards (via such tools as regression analyses and decision consistency approaches) as part of the validation procedures they use in empirically justifying the English proficient level chosen. Carrying out this type of examination, however, is different from directly incorporating academic achievement standards into the definition of “English learner.”

knowledge and skills at each defined language proficiency level across the ELP assessments used by consortium members in the implementation of their proposed assessment system.

We note additionally that, under this grant category, peer reviewers will consider an eligible applicant's approach and strategy for designing and developing accommodations (as defined in the NIA), accommodation policies, and methods for standardizing the use of those accommodations for English learners (Selection Criterion (A)(4)(b)). (Also, under both Race to the Top Assessment grant categories, reviewers will consider how the assessment system or program includes appropriate accommodations (as defined in the Notice Inviting Applications) for these students (Selection Criteria (A)(3)(b)(iii) and (B)(3)(d)(v), respectively).)