



# RESEARCH BRIEF

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## Using FSA ELA Student Achievement Data in Making ESOL Exit Decisions

### At a Glance

**This Research Brief describes a possible method of operationally defining what constitutes English proficiency for English language learners. In addition, it describes specific results on the English Language Proficiency test that correspond to English proficiency defined in that way. Furthermore, it suggests practical uses for such information.**

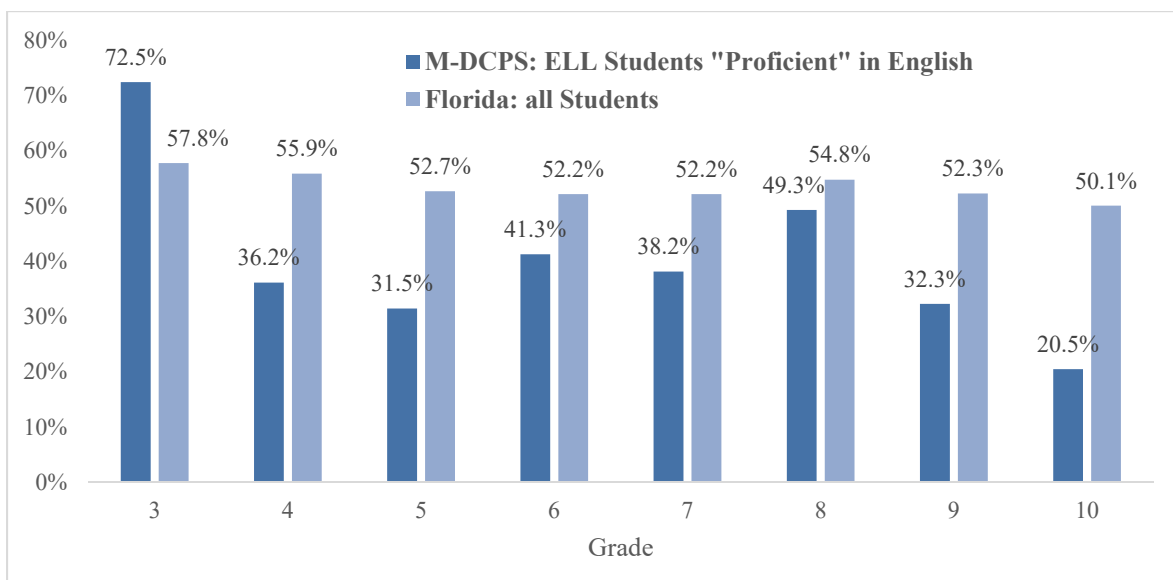
Currently, the State Board of Education Rule 6A-6.0903 stipulates that to be eligible for an exit from the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, a student must score “Proficient” on the State’s English Language Proficiency Assessment. In addition, a student in grades 3-9 must achieve at least level 3 on the English Language Arts (ELA) component of the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA or FSAA) while a student in grades 10-12 must either achieve a level 3 or above on the FSA or FSAA ELA or achieve an appropriate concordant score to satisfy the ELA high school graduation requirement.

Currently, the State uses ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 as the required English Language Proficiency Assessment. The State Board of Education Rule 6A-6.09021 defines scoring “Proficient” as achieving at least a level 4 in the Reading component of ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 and at least a level 4 on a composite scale. A composite proficiency level is determined based on student scores in all four domains of the assessment: Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking.

## Reasonableness of the Proficiency Definition

It is reasonable to expect that students who have participated in the ESOL program, have acquired sufficient knowledge and skills in English, and have been determined proficient in English in accordance with the definition above should perform sufficiently well on the ELA component of FSA. That is, we can expect that students who have been declared proficient in English based on their outcomes on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 perform at about the same level as native English speakers on the FSA ELA or at least as well as students in the State overall. (The State assessment results are selected for this comparison rather than the District's results because in the District almost one-half of all students in grades K-12 are current or former participants in the ESOL program.)

A chart below shows the percentages of ELL students in M-DCPS who have been determined proficient in English based on their 2017 ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 results scoring within achievement levels 3-5 on the 2017 FSA ELA and statewide percentages of students scoring at least level 3 on the 2017 FSA ELA.



One can see that the definition currently used in Florida to determine proficiency in English based on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 results is not sufficiently rigorous in almost all grade levels shown in the chart above: the proportions of Grades 4-10 M-DCPS ELL students determined proficient in English and scoring within achievement levels 3-5 on the 2017 FSA ELA are lower than the percentages of all students statewide.

On the other hand, a requirement for any ELL student in grades 3 or above to score at least level 3 on the FSA ELA (or demonstrate a concordant score that satisfies the ELA graduation requirement) to be eligible for an exit from the ESOL program amounts to holding ELL students to a very high standard: 100% of such students need to score at least level 3 on the FSA ELA. At

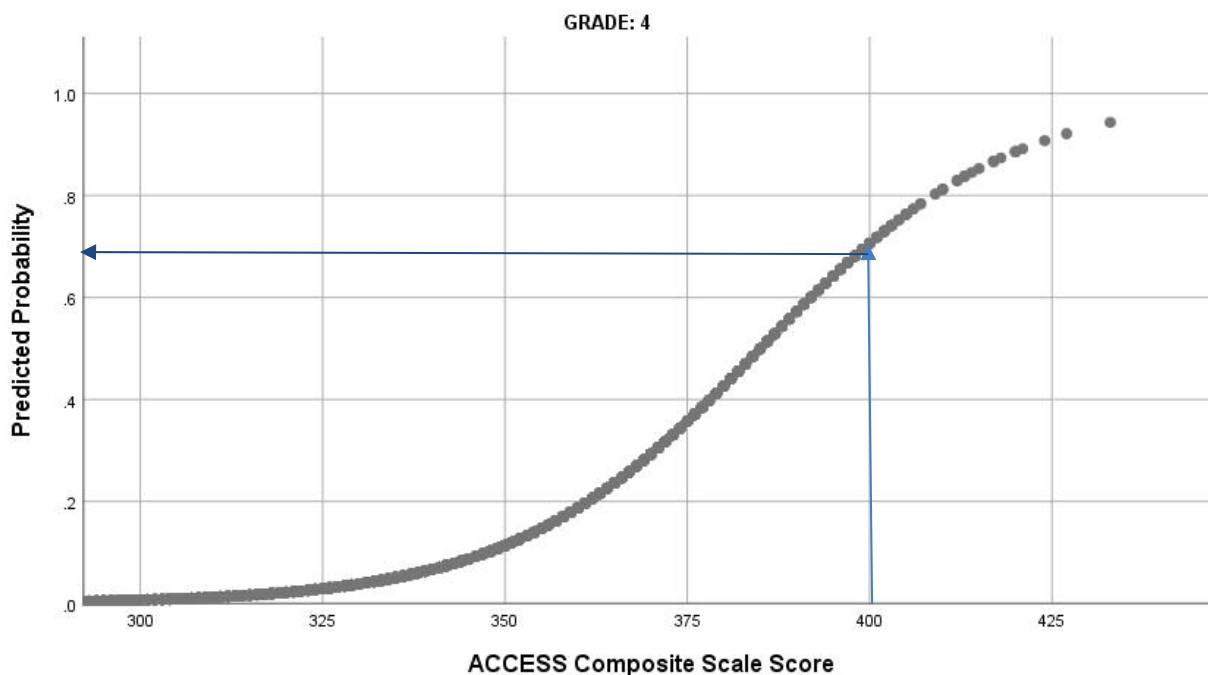
the same time, the percentages of all students in grades 3-10 in Florida satisfying such a standard vary from a low of 50.1% for students in grade 10 to a high of 57.8% for students in grade 3.

Thus, the definition of English language proficiency set in one of the State Board rules appears to not be sufficiently rigorous, whereas the requirements for an eligibility for an exit from the ESOL program set in another State Board rule for students in grades 3-10 appear to be overly stringent.

## Setting an Alternative Definition of English Proficiency

A possible way to bridge this divide is to use the data on both ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 and FSA ELA to directly compute the probability of scoring at least level 3 on the FSA ELA for a given grade level and a scale score on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. This calculation can be accomplished via a binary logistic regression, in which an outcome is a dichotomous variable signifying whether a student scored within achievement levels 3-5 on the FSA ELA and a predictor is a composite scale score on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0.

The results of fitting this model in grade 4 (as an example) are shown in the chart below.



The graph shows that a student in grade 4 who had a composite scale score of 400 on the 2017 ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 had an approximate probability of 0.7 of scoring within achievement levels 3-5 on the FSA ELA. A student who achieved a composite scale score higher than 400 on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 would have even higher probability of success on FSA ELA.

A graph like the one displayed above could be used to find a composite scale score on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 at which the probability of scoring within achievement levels 3-5 on the FSA ELA

matches the percentage of all students statewide who score at least level 3. The observed percentage of students scoring at least level 3 on the FSA ELA, if they achieved such a scale score **or higher** on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0, would be higher than the probability of success predicted by the model for that composite scale score. That would happen because the students with even higher ACCESS scores than the one selected would have an even higher probability of success.

Therefore, the information provided by the binary logistic model could be used only as a starting point to find specific composite scale scores and the corresponding proficiency levels on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 that would signify reaching proficiency in English in the following sense: the percentages of students scoring within achievement levels 3-5 on the FSA ELA among those who achieved at such a level of proficiency on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 would match the percentages of students statewide scoring at least level 3 on the FSA ELA.

A search for the specific composite proficiency levels was performed for each of the grade levels 4-10, and the results are shown in the table below. Proficiency levels rather than scale scores were selected to make the practical use of this information easier.

<b>Grade</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Composite Proficiency Level</b>	4.9	5.0	4.8	4.8	4.5	4.8	5.0

### **Possible Utility of this Information**

The State Board of Education Rule 6A-6.0903 provides another venue for exiting students from an ESOL program. A school’s ELL committee shall review the student’s academic records holistically considering the student’s assessment results on the English Language Proficiency test as well as other relevant information, such as course grades, assessment results on other tests, teacher observations, etc.

At the beginning of each school year, a list of students who satisfied the operational definition of English proficiency by scoring at least at the composite proficiency levels shown in the table above can be provided to schools and referred to ELL committees to be used as one part of the evidence to decide whether such students are English proficient. The specific ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 composite proficiency levels can be recalibrated each school year using the results of that assessment and those on the FSA ELA as described above.