



State of Arizona
Department of Education

May 2, 2016

Dear AZELLA Test Coordinators and ELL Directors:

The Arizona Department of Education (ADE) has recently reviewed the entire AZELLA program to confirm that we are best meeting the needs of English language learners (ELLs). From this review, we found that a small group of students were incorrectly identified as Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP) students when they should have been identified as ELL-Parent Withdrawal students. We also found that the existing Proficiency level cut scores for some AZELLA tests might not be set high enough to ensure that students have sufficient English skills to meaningfully participate in mainstream classrooms where instruction is aligned to more rigorous college and career ready standards. ADE has created a plan to address these issues. This letter will describe that plan and identify the actions required at the LEA/school level.

Newly reclassified ELL-Parent Withdrawal Students

As explained in our [letter of March 16, 2016](#), Kindergarten IFEP students who did not pass the Reassessment test and whose parents subsequently declined ELL services during school years 2012-13 and 2013-14, incorrectly maintained their IFEP classification. ADE has changed the classification of these students to ELL-Parent Withdrawal students. As ELL-Parent Withdrawal students, their English proficiency must be assessed this school year and every school year until they demonstrate proficiency. For this school year, the required testing of these students will be accomplished through the administration of an AZELLA Placement test to the Grade 2 students and an AzMERIT ELA test to the Grade 3 students. Grade 3 students who pass an AzMERIT ELA test will be classified as Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) students and will no longer require annual English proficiency assessment. However, Grade 3 students who do not pass an AzMERIT ELA test will require an AZELLA Placement test at the start of school year 2016-17 as entering Grade 4 students.

Actions Required

- **By May 20, 2016**, schools must administer an AZELLA Placement test to the Grade 2 students listed in the ADEConnect “Newly Reclassified ELL-Parent Withdrawal Students Report” application.

Students who pass the AZELLA Placement test will be classified as RFEP students and will no longer require annual English proficiency assessment. Students who do not pass the AZELLA Placement test are eligible for and must be offered ELL services for school year 2016-17. If ELL services are accepted, the students will be considered ELL students; otherwise, if parents decline services as documented on the Parent Request for Student Withdrawal Form, these students will be classified as ELL-Parent Withdrawal students. Both ELL and ELL-Parent Withdrawal students must participate in annual Reassessment testing, beginning with Spring 2017, until they demonstrate proficiency.

- **Within the first two weeks of the start of school year 2016-17**, schools must administer an AZELLA Placement test to the newly reclassified ELL-Parent Withdrawal students who did not pass their AzMERIT Grade 3 ELA test. These entering Grade 4 students will be identified on the SDELL73 report as being in need of an AZELLA Placement test. The SDELL73 report is updated nightly based on student enrollment.

Students who pass the AZELLA Placement test will be classified as RFEP students and will no longer require annual English proficiency assessment. Students who do not pass the AZELLA Placement test are eligible for and must be offered ELL services for school year 2016-17. If ELL services are accepted, the students will be considered ELL students; otherwise, if parents decline services as documented on the Parent Request for Student Withdrawal Form, these students will be classified as ELL-Parent Withdrawal students. Both ELL and ELL-Parent Withdrawal students must participate in annual Reassessment testing, beginning with Spring 2017, until they demonstrate proficiency.



Resetting the AZELLA Kindergarten Placement Test Proficient Cut Score

ADE is raising the Proficient cut score for the AZELLA Kindergarten Placement Test from a scale score 245 to a scale score 257. With this higher cut score, we expect the proficiency rate on the AZELLA Kindergarten Placement Test to change from about 45% to about 30%.

The change in the Proficient cut score is effective retroactively to school year 2014-15. The cut score change will be in place when Placement testing opens on July 11, 2016 and will be reflected in the AZELLA score reports beginning with the first reporting cycle of school year 2016-17. Score reports for school years 2014-15 and 2015-16 will not automatically be changed to reflect the new Proficient cut score.

Reevaluating the English proficiency of some IFEP Kindergarten and Grade 1 students

Even though the AZELLA Kindergarten Placement test score reports for school years 2014-15 and 2015-16 will not be changed to reflect the revised Proficient cut score, the English language proficiency of students who scored at or above the previous Proficient cut score (245) but below the new Proficient cut score (257) during these school years must be reevaluated. ADE has identified the current IFEP Kindergarten and Grade 1 students who have an AZELLA Kindergarten Placement Test score below the new Proficient cut score.

Per Arizona statute, English learners are defined as students who are not currently able to perform ordinary classroom work in English, and once English learners have acquired a good working knowledge of English and are able to do regular school work in English, they are to be reclassified. Therefore, any of these identified IFEP students who are performing at or above grade level are not ELL students, and any of these identified IFEP students who are performing below grade level might lack an appropriate level of English proficiency to benefit from mainstream instruction and qualify for ELL services.

ADE has developed a “Grade Level Performance Survey” application on ADEConnect which lists, by school or district, all of the IFEP Kindergarten and Grade 1 students with an AZELLA Kindergarten Placement Test score below 257. This survey will be used to identify which students performed at or above grade level during this school year and which students performed below grade level this school year. Students identified as performing at or above grade level will retain their IFEP status. Students identified as performing below grade level for school year 2015-16 will take an AZELLA Placement Test at the beginning of school year 2016-17. Students who pass the AZELLA Placement Test will retain their IFEP status. Students who do not pass the AZELLA Placement test must be offered ELL services for school year 2016-17. If ELL services are accepted, the students will be considered ELL students. If parents decline services as documented on the Parent Request for Student Withdrawal Form, these students will be classified as ELL-Parent Withdrawal students. Both ELL and ELL-Parent Withdrawal students must participate in annual Reassessment testing, beginning with Spring 2017, until they demonstrate proficiency. Students who are not identified as either at/above grade level or below grade level in the survey will be treated as if they were marked below grade level.

Actions Required

- **Between May 12, 2016 and June 23, 2016**, schools must complete the “Grade Level Performance Survey” on ADEConnect. For each student listed, indicate whether the student’s performance for school year 2015-16 was at/above grade level or below grade level. The determination of student performance should be based on (1) teacher input; (2) the student’s report card grades; (3) the student’s performance on the required reading assessments; and (4) any other information available to the school related to the student’s classroom performance for this school year.
- **Within the first two weeks of the start of school year 2016-17**, schools must administer an AZELLA Placement test to the students identified on the “Grade Level Performance Survey” as performing below grade level for school year 2015-16. These entering Grade 1 and Grade 2 students will be identified on the SDELL73 report as being in need of an AZELLA Placement test. The SDELL73 report is updated nightly based on student enrollment.
Students who pass the AZELLA Placement test will retain their IFEP status. Students who do not pass the AZELLA Placement test are eligible for and must be offered ELL services for school year 2016-17. If ELL services are accepted, the students will be considered ELL students; otherwise, if parents decline services

as documented on the Parent Request for Student Withdrawal Form, these students will be considered ELL-Parent Withdrawal students. Both ELL and ELL-Parent Withdrawal students must participate in annual Reassessment testing, beginning with Spring 2017, until they demonstrate proficiency.

Resetting the AZELLA Stages III-V Proficient Cut Scores

ADE will raise the Proficient cut scores for the AZELLA Stages III, IV, and V tests to a level that makes it more likely Fluent English Proficient – Year 2 (FEP2) students will perform like their English only peers on AzMERIT ELA. ADE has determined preliminary new Proficient cut scores based on 2015 AzMERIT and AZELLA results. These preliminary cut scores will be confirmed or revised based on 2016 AzMERIT and AZELLA results. The finalized new cut scores will be announced in a letter on July 1, 2016 and will be in effect beginning in school year 2016-17.

Offer services to some IFEP and RFEP students

Students with an IFEP or RFEP status based on an AZELLA Stage III, IV, or V test administered in school year 2012-13 and later with proficient scores below the new Proficient cut scores might need additional English language services if their current classroom performance is below that of their English only peers.

ADE will identify all IFEP and RFEP students with AZELLA scores below the new Proficient cut scores. ADE will compare the AzMERIT ELA scores for these students to AzMERIT ELA scores for English only students on the same test. Any of these students with an AzMERIT ELA score that is at or above the average score for English only students will be considered to be performing like their English only peers. A list of IFEP and RFEP students with AZELLA scores below the new Proficient cut scores and without an AzMERIT ELA score at or above the average score for English only students will be provided to schools in an ADEConnect survey application in mid-July. In a manner similar to the process described above, schools will indicate whether these students are performing at/above their English only peers or below their English only peers. For those students identified as performing below their English only peers, schools must offer English language services that best meet the student's need(s). This survey will need to be completed early in the school year and any services provided must be in place as soon as possible.

Action Required

- **On July 1, 2016**, you will receive a letter from ADE with information about the new AZELLA cut scores, the steps and timeline for identifying students who need additional English language services, the types of services that must be offered to these students, and the timeline for providing additional services.

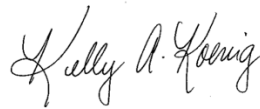
How the testing and performance of any of the students described in the letter will be included in any ELL Accountability has yet to be determined.

All communication with parents related to actions described in the letter must be in a language the parents understand and must state that the purpose of the notification is to ensure their student's educational needs are being met.

Regardless of any procedures described in this letter, classroom teachers may always refer a student for an AZELLA Placement test if they see that the student has a language need.



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