



# STATE OF IOWA

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
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**DATE:** April 28, 2009

**TO:** School Administrators  
AEA Administrators  
AEA ELL Consultants

**FROM:** Kevin Fangman, Administrator  
Division of PK-12 Education

**SUBJECT:** Determinations Process for English Language Learners Effective  
Beginning with the Spring 2009 ELDA Results

In September of 2008, the United States Department of Education (USDE) determined that Iowa needed consistent, uniform definitions for the following terms: *transitional*, *proficient*, and *exiting*. This was deemed necessary for the purpose of consistently identifying, properly serving, and exiting English Language Learners (ELLs) from services across Iowa.

**Proficient** refers to a level of English language development that a student has achieved. (It is not a level of placement in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.) It is also an indication that such a student might be moved from a regular ELL program into a **Transitional** phase (a point in the ELL program), in which the student is followed with some ELL services until school personnel are confident that an ELL student is able to progress on their own without ELL services. The **Transitional** phase can last up to two years, after which a decision is made to **Exit** the student into the general education program with no ELL support, or to reclassify the student as needing additional support.

In the fall, the Iowa ESL network composed of consultants from the area education agencies, classroom teachers, school administrators, higher education specialists in ESL, and members of the Iowa Department of Education met to begin the process of developing state-wide definitions for those terms. After much discussion and thought, the following definitions were agreed upon and approved by the USED:

- **Proficient**

A student will be considered proficient when he/she achieves a composite Iowa ELDA (I-ELDA) level of 5 or 6. (Evidence shows that students at composite level 6 have a 95% success rate on the ITBS. Students at 5 have a slightly under 70% success rate on the ITBS. Although there may be no clear cut instructional

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implications for these students, it is clear that composite level 6 students are more capable of competing with their English only classmates without additional support.)

- **Transitional**

A student will be considered transitional when he/she receives minimal ELL support, and sustained academic progress is evidenced for a period of up to 2 years. Transitional students must take the I-ELDA as part of a demonstration of English language proficiency.

- **Exited**

A student may be able to be exited after sufficient input from teacher, parents, and other staff and a composite level 6 on the I-ELDA, and meet 3 of the 4 of the following criteria (this is a local decision):

- Success in a regular classroom
- ELL support not required
- Sustainability of success
- Score proficient on district-wide and state wide assessments such as ITBS, ITED.

**The USDE has approved these definitions. These definitions should be used to make proficiency determinations for ELLs using the results from the spring 2009 ELDA and in subsequent years.** As these guidelines are implemented, if a specific student's placement in an ELL program is unclear, please contact your AEA ELL specialist or John Scott at [John.Scott@iowa.gov](mailto:John.Scott@iowa.gov) (515-281-3805) for assistance.