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GUIDANCE MEMORANDUM # 17-19

TO: School District Superintendents

FROM: Steve Canavero, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Public Instruction

SUBJECT: English Learner Exit Criteria and 2017 WIDA Proficiency Scores

Nevada EL Assessment and Exit Challenge

During the 2016-17 school year, the WIDA consortium implemented more rigorous English language expectations for English learner (EL) students. This resulted in a drop in the number of EL students exiting EL status. Based on the spring 2017 WIDA assessment, the percentage of EL students achieving the statewide EL Exit Criteria in Nevada dropped to approximately 2 percent. For the previous four years, the percentage of Nevada's English learners achieving the state's EL Exit Criteria was approximately 11 percent. This pattern of decrease in English language proficiency was typical across the country in states that participate in the WIDA Consortium. These drops in English language proficiency, in large part, can be attributed to the more rigorous English language expectations that are assessed through the WIDA ACCESS 2.0 assessment.

The Nevada Department of Education (NDE) has been reviewing EL assessment results and researching how other states are addressing similar concerns. This Guidance Memorandum provides information regarding the steps Nevada is taking to ensure that the statewide English learner (EL) exit criteria are consistently fair and accurate.

Current EL Assessment

The state of Nevada currently uses the WIDA ACCESS 2.0 assessment to meet the federal requirement that all identified English learners be assessed annually to determine English language proficiency. As prescribed by law, the assessment must align with the state-adopted English language proficiency standards and measure English language proficiency in four domains: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. WIDA assessments are designed to measure the language that students need in various educational contexts. Each assessment item and task targets at least one of the five English language proficiency standards:

- Social and Instructional Language
- Language of Language Arts
- Language of Mathematics
- Language of Science
- Language of Social Studies

Current EL Exit Criteria

Nevada's current statewide EL exit criteria are based on the WIDA ACCESS 2.0 assessment:

- Minimum proficiency level of 5.0 Composite; and
- Minimum proficiency level of 5.0 Literacy sub-score

2017 WIDA ACCESS 2.0 Score Changes

To meet language demands of state-adopted college and career readiness standards, WIDA conducted a standards setting process in 2016. The process was designed with state input to align language expectations of the WIDA ACCESS 2.0 assessment with the academic language that is necessary for students to achieve proficiency on state content assessments. As a result, scale score changes were applied to the 2016-17 WIDA ACCESS 2.0 to align with the academic language expectations for EL students to meet college and career-readiness standards. When comparing 2017 WIDA results with 2016 in Nevada, many EL student proficiency scores went down and fewer students met Nevada's English learner exit criteria.

Preliminary WIDA results for the 2016-17 school year show that approximately 2 percent of EL students assessed met the current EL exit criteria.

Considering a new EL Exit Criteria for Nevada

Anticipating the impact of the WIDA standard-setting process and adjusted English language proficiency levels, the Nevada Department of Education committed to conducting an analysis of the relationship between Nevada academic content assessment and English language proficiency assessment results. The goal is to determine the level of English proficiency at which EL students are able to perform at levels commensurate with their non-EL peers on academic content assessments. Based on the data, Nevada will convene local school district and community representatives to determine if recommendations should be made to the Nevada State Board of Education to maintain or revise the statewide EL exit criteria. Representatives from Local School District EL Programs, the English Mastery Council, and the ESSA English Learner Work Group recommended that Nevada review WIDA results to ensure that the EL Exit Criteria are appropriately aligned with the academic language needs of students to ensure access to state academic content standards. The Nevada Department of Education will continue to solicit public input in developing recommendations for the State Board of Education.

In setting state exit criteria for English learners, it is important to ensure that the level of English language proficiency is sufficient to ensure that EL students are able to access content curriculum without the supports of EL services. As Nevada considers establishing new EL exit criteria, advocates for English learners have expressed several concerns:

1. If English learners are reclassified as English proficient and exit EL language supports before their academic language is sufficient to engage in more rigorous academic content, they will not have meaningful access to educational experiences needed to be academically successful and, ultimately, college and career ready.
2. Schools need to ensure that the language instruction educational programs and supports that are provided to English learners are of sufficient quality and intensity to develop more complex academic language and higher levels of English proficiency.

3. Once English learners have developed sufficient academic language to fully access rigorous content and no longer need language support services, they should be reclassified as English proficient in a timely way.

Stakeholder engagement in the process of establishing Nevada EL exit criteria will help to ensure that the concerns of educators and community leaders are addressed.

Considerations for a 2017 Interim EL Exit Criteria

Based on Nevada's preliminary 2017 WIDA results, the EL Team at the Nevada Department of Education reviewed how other states were responding to the impact of the WIDA standard setting on proficiency levels. Some WIDA Consortium states planned to conduct a similar assessment analysis to determine if they should set new state EL exit criteria. A few states implemented a 2017 interim EL exit criteria while waiting for such an analysis to be completed. NDE leadership authorized the NDE EL Team to gather relevant data and LEA input regarding the possibility of establishing an Interim 2017 EL Exit Criteria for Nevada. Based on that process, the NDE EL Team drafted the following 2017 Interim EL Exit Criteria:

- Minimum proficiency level of 4.5 Composite; and
- Minimum proficiency level of 4.2 Literacy sub-score

In analyzing Nevada's 2016-17 WIDA data, approximately 8.4 percent of Nevada's EL students would achieve the suggested Interim EL Exit Criteria.

NDE Determination

To avoid the potential confusion of implementing two distinct EL Exit Criteria for the 2016-17 school year (an Interim EL Exit Criteria and a potentially different State-Board-approved EL Exit Criteria), NDE leadership chose to pursue a one-time State-Board-approved EL Exit Criteria in the fall based on recommendations from the content and language assessment analysis.

If the State Board of Education approves new EL Exit Criteria in the fall of 2017, the NDE EL Team would recommend that LEAs use the new criteria to reclassify additional EL students that met the amended EL Exit Criteria based on the spring 2017 WIDA assessment results.

New ESSA Requirements

Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the new Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) will publicly report on progress toward achieving English language proficiency. School ratings will use adequate growth percentile (AGP) to measure EL student growth toward English language proficiency. Because it would be difficult to determine the impact that the "re-setting" of WIDA proficiency scores could have on AGP, NDE is working with WIDA to use comparable 2015-16 and 2016-17 WIDA score scales to calculate AGP for NSPF purposes.

The NDE EL Team will continue to work with the NDE Assessment, Data & Accountability Management office to determine the impact of the WIDA standards setting process and to help local school district Assessment and English Learner Coordinators understand the changes.

Recommendations for Local Education Agencies (LEAs)

1. Identify and reclassify those EL students who met the current Nevada EL Exit Criteria (5.0 Composite and 5.0 Literacy) on the spring 2017 WIDA assessment.
2. As required by Title III requirements, provide parent notifications of 2017 EL student assessment results. LEAs may choose to include information regarding the impact on EL student proficiency

scores resulting from the WIDA standard setting process (see WIDA website for parent resources).

3. For those EL students who were close to meeting the EL Exit Criteria in 2016, but did not achieve the current Nevada EL Exit Criteria on the 2017 WIDA assessment, consider individual student language development needs in planning for the 2017-18 school year.
4. If the Nevada State Board of Education establishes new EL Exit Criteria, identify and reclassify those EL students who met the new Nevada EL Exit Criteria on the spring 2017 WIDA assessment.
5. For all continuing EL students, consider individual student language development needs in planning for the 2017-18 school year.
6. In accordance with the guidelines defined under the *Castañeda v. Pickard* court decision, evaluate the effectiveness of local language instruction educational programs to ensure that they are of sufficient scope and quality to meet the needs of English learners.
7. Utilize available resources (e.g. local funds, SB 390/Zoom, SB 178/Weighted Formula, Title III, Title I) to build, sustain, or enhance quality language instruction educational programs and services for English learners that meet the ESSA evidence-based criteria.

Questions related to the scoring of the WIDA ACCESS 2.0 assessment and the process for considering new EL Exit Criteria recommendations can be directed to the English Learner Team in the Office of Student and School Supports (Karl Wilson, Education Programs Supervisor, at karlwilson@doe.nv.gov).

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Cove". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.