



Arizona Department of Education
Student Achievement and Educator Excellence Division &
Office of English Language Acquisition Services

Considerations for Initial Assessment and Program Placement

October 30, 2020

Dear Superintendents, Directors, and Coordinators:

I hope this letter finds you well. As we all continue to navigate through these unprecedented times, we at OELAS want to make sure that we continue to provide the most up-to-date guidance as well as any support you may need in meeting the needs of your unique special populations. Guidance from the U.S. Department of Education continues to emphasize SEA and LEA obligations for upholding English learners' (ELs') civil rights during the COVID-19 pandemic, including initial identification, EL program placement, the provision of language services and access to content as well as communication with parents. Although challenging during distance learning, Federal civil rights requirements mandate continuity in language and content learning for English learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. In working with the field across the state of Arizona as well as with our national partners, it's been realized that lessons learned as we have restarted and moved forward should be considered opportunities to work creatively, strategically and effectively with our students and educators during the ongoing pandemic and well beyond into the future.

In recent weeks, OELAS, the Student Achievement and Educator Excellence Division, and stakeholders from our LEAs have identified a couple areas of concern that might be more widespread, regarding initial placement assessment, EL program placement and the inputting of data. It is important for us to stress that **everyone at the agency is aware and understands** that meeting requirements and timelines around these areas can be especially challenging and may even feel impossible in the current context. In order to be of support in your efforts, below you will find what has come to light, as well as a link to previous guidance, updated forms to be used in the interim and resources that can be helpful to you and your educators.

Following guidance from the Student Achievement and Educator Excellence Division regarding administering the placement test when it was safe to do so, it was anticipated that students would be assessed as LEAs and Charters began transitioning to students on campus, whether it be as part of a hybrid model or full in-person. As of October 19, the number of students who have taken the AZELLA Placement Test, compared to last year, is overwhelmingly less. Although we expected the number to be much lower, the difference is quite substantial. The EL71 - EL Program Participation Report, which lists the number of ELs and program they are participating in at a given LEA, is also showing a significant discrepancy in the number of students compared to last year. With both, the trepidation becomes ensuring students are being appropriately identified and placed in EL programs, and ensuring they are provided access and opportunity to both Language and Literacy development.

Please visit the OELAS website at www.azed.gov/oelas for guidance and resources or refer to your AZELLA District Test Coordinator who has been provided with guidance to facilitate safe and secure test administration for students and Test Administrators.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melissa Castillo".

Melissa Castillo, Ed.D.
Deputy Associate Superintendent
Office of English Language Acquisition Services
Arizona Department of Education