



# English Language Testing Fall 2020 Considerations

## BACKGROUND

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 and the closure of schools, the California Department of Education (CDE) issued temporary guidelines for a number of statewide standardized tests, including the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) for English Learners (ELs). ELPAC testing consists of two phases:

- 1) **Initial testing** - when an identified English-learner student first starts school in each school district, often at the beginning of kindergarten, and by law, must take place within 30 days of a student's first day of school. This assessment is only taken once by the student.
- 2) **Summative testing** - in the spring of each school year to monitor the English learner's growth and reclassifying the student. This assessment is taken yearly until the student reclassifies as English proficient.

Both initial and summative tests include portions measuring English proficiency in four domains: reading, writing, listening and speaking. In kindergarten and grade 1, all domains are administered individually, one-on-one with the teacher or test examiner. In grades 2–12, the test is administered in groups exclusive of speaking, which is assessed one-on-one.

The CDE suspended spring 2020 summative ELPAC testing when school campuses closed. However, because of variations in school calendars and testing windows, some schools had already begun or completed summative testing before school closures. The CDE announced that students who had already completed the summative test in all four domains would receive scores, and that students who had not completed testing in all four domains would not receive scores. Additionally, students who did not complete summative testing in the spring would be given the opportunity to retake the summative test in the fall for reclassification purposes.

### Initial Placement and Testing for 2020-21

In anticipation of schools re-opening in the fall of 2020, the CDE's plan for ELPAC testing was that new 2019-20 students who had missed initial ELPAC testing would take their initial tests upon return to school, students who had not completed the ELPAC summative test in the spring would have the opportunity to do so in the fall for possible reclassification, and incoming kindergarteners and other new 2020-21 students would take their initial ELPAC tests in August and September. With the continued severity of the COVID-19 pandemic, most school campuses across California will remain closed for the start of the school year, raising a number of new questions, particularly about initial ELPAC testing and claims of in-person testing requirements.

The CDE has been slow to provide updated guidance regarding ELPAC testing for the fall of 2020. The following is the most current information posted by the CDE which is rapidly being updated:

1. The CDE and the Educational Testing Service (ETS) describe three possible models for fall testing (updated by the CDE: 8/7/20). Please note, however, that as of 8/5/20, the **CDE was still advising school districts to wait on all remote testing until the CDE publishes more detailed guidance on remote testing protocols.**

- **In-Person/Co-Located** – Students and test examiners are physically present in the same location. The testing location must meet all regular testing environment guidelines from the CDE and ETS as well as all COVID-19 safety and social distancing procedures required by local health departments. The CDE has provided additional suggestions for physical set ups – [Suggested Guidelines for Physically Distancing Test Administration](#).
- **Remote Testing with Paper-Pencil Assessments** – Appropriate for students taking the Initial ELPAC prior to August 19, 2020, K-2 students taking the Initial or Summative Writing Test, and any other students approved to take the paper-pencil Initial or Summative Test as part of an IEP, 504 plan or other accommodation plan. Students would take the test remotely, either by being given the paper-pencil testing materials to take at home and complete or by being shown testing questions via an online conferencing platform, respond, and then return completed testing materials. Examiners would monitor testing remotely using continuous audio and video via an online conferencing platform throughout the entire test administration.
- **Remote Testing with Online Assessments** – Portions of the ELPAC are available as online assessments. For one-on-one tests, the student and examiner would interact via an online conferencing platform with the examiner sharing his or her screen and recording student responses. For tests not requiring one-on-one administration, students would take online tests remotely using the designated secure browser on their computer from their location, with examiners monitoring testing remotely through the test delivery system as well as continuous audio and video via an online conferencing platform throughout the entire test administration.

2. There are several additional complexities around Initial ELPAC assessment:

- **Home Language Surveys** (updated by the CDE: 7/24/20) – Normally, as part of their enrollment packages, parents of entering kindergarten students and students new to a district would receive Home Language Surveys that would be used to help determine if students are English learners and entitled to receive English Language Development (ELD) services. However, with many schools physically closed, districts have been directed by the CDE to find other ways to complete Home Language Surveys, including electronically (but districts must offer additional assistance for parents who may not have internet access or be fluent in English) or over the telephone (with interpreters if

needed). Parents are also to be informed that, until an Initial ELPAC test can be given and actual eligibility determined, students will be provided with ELD services.

- **Testing Window** – School districts are required to complete initial ELPAC testing within 30 days of a student’s first day of school. School districts with large numbers of incoming English learners (including incoming kindergarteners) will often attempt to conduct initial ELPAC testing during summer or in the first few weeks of school in the fall. When asked directly about the challenges of conducting initial ELPAC testing on a 30-day timeline during ongoing school site closures, leadership from the CDE Office of English Language Proficiency and Spanish Assessments responded, “[L]ocal educational agencies (LEAs) must make every effort to administer the state’s Initial ELPAC and determine their students’ official English language status within the 30 days as required by law. If you are unable to administer due to school closures, please refer to [the following guidance that California has just released...](#)” (7/30/20) and then provided alternatives to immediate initial testing, including provisionally determining students’ eligibility for EL services based on Home Language Surveys. The CDE also anticipates a 45-day extension to the 30-day testing timeline, moving most schools’ deadline to November 13, 2020 and giving districts time to implement either safe in-person testing protocols or appropriate remote testing procedures.
- **Paper-Pencil vs. Computer-Based Assessment** (updated by the CDE: 5/21/20 & 7/20/20) – Before the COVID-19 pandemic and shift to distance learning, ETS had been planning on phasing out most paper-pencil initial ELPAC testing. For the 2020-21 school year, districts are allowed to continue to use paper-based testing materials until August 19, 2020. Beginning August 20, 2020, all initial ELPAC testing will transition to a computer-based assessment platform except for the K-2 writing tests, which will remain paper-pencil.
- **Federal Requirements** – for Title 1 funding purposes, states must assess all EL students with the identified state English language proficiency assessment within the 30-day timeline and submit that data to the Department of Education. As noted earlier, the CDE anticipates a 45-day extension moving the deadline to November 13, 2020.

**Optional 2019-2020 Summative Assessment Make-Ups** (updated by the CDE: 8/4/20)

Students who were unable to complete ELPAC summative testing in spring 2020 *may* participate in an *optional* re-administration of the 2019-20 Summative ELPAC Assessment in fall 2020 for reclassification purposes. The window for test administration will open on August 20, 2020 and close on October 30, 2020. Only students who were unable to begin or complete summative testing in spring 2020 are eligible for retesting, and if they take the summative test again in the fall, they must take the full test, not just the portions they missed in spring. Students who completed summative testing in spring 2020 *may not* retake the test in the fall.

## Considerations for Teachers and Local Chapters

Some school district may attempt to move forward with in-person Initial ELPAC testing in August and September, either because that's the way they've always done it or because they are unaware that there are alternatives. This has the potential to put students and examiners at risk of COVID-19 infection due to inadequate safety precautions and the close student-to-examiner contact involved with in-person testing. Before any teacher or local chapter agrees to resume in-person testing, remember that the CDE has clearly stated that all local health department protocols must be followed, as well as additional physical testing guidelines published by the CDE and ETS. Precautions developed internally by school districts, or even school districts and local associations, are not sufficient. If school districts cannot demonstrate that all local and CDE/ETS health protocols and guidelines will be followed, they should not move forward with in-person testing. In lieu of in-person testing, the CDE has authorized remote testing using paper-pencil and online platforms, pending further guidance, and is anticipating an extended timeline for the initial ELPAC testing.

Resist efforts to rush into unsafe in-person testing by educating district testing coordinators of the alternatives to in-person testing as well as flexibility around the 30-day testing timeline. If they are unresponsive, this becomes an organizing issue with members and an opportunity to reach out to parents and School Board members regarding unnecessary risks to students and staff.

For more information and resources to assist with bargaining and organizing over these issues, please visit the [CTA Leader Resource Center](#) and [Center for Organizing and Bargaining](#) webpage. Questions about English learner services can be emailed to the CDE English Learner Support Division at [ELSD@cde.ca.gov](mailto:ELSD@cde.ca.gov).

### **Sources**

- California Department of Education – [COVID-19 Assessment FAQs](#)
- California Department of Education – [English Learner Services During COVID-19 FAQs](#)
- English Language Proficiency Assessments for California – [Implications of COVID-19 and the Suspension of Testing](#)