



IDENTIFYING YOUNG DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS: STATE POLICIES, HOME LANGUAGE SURVEYS, AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The United States is becoming a more culturally, linguistically and racially diverse nation. This is especially true when we look at the youngest generation. It is estimated that nearly one in every three children under the age of 17 lives in a home where a language other than English is spoken (Child Trends, 2014). In some states, this percentage is even greater. In California, the percentage of school age children growing up in homes speaking a language other than English is 45 percent, in Texas it's 35 percent and, in states not typically known for their diverse populations such as Illinois, Oregon, and Nebraska, the percentages are 25, 21, and 14, respectively (Camarota & Zeigler, 2014).

Increasingly, states and localities are establishing and expanding publicly funded prekindergarten (Pre-K) as a strategy for supporting the readiness of all young children for kindergarten and beyond, especially young children from families with low-incomes. Many publicly funded Pre-K programs also target children from homes speaking a language other than English.

The growing diversity of populations with greater access to publicly funded Pre-K increases the need to accurately identify young children as dual language learners (DLLs) prior to kindergarten. Determining children's home languages and level of proficiency in English and their home languages early in the enrollment process, enables teachers and administrators to make better decisions regarding children's language strengths, and appropriate developmental and instructional goals (Wright, 2014). This brief addresses the questions: How are states identifying and assessing young DLLs? What policies and practices are in place? What assessment measures are appropriate and effective? It examines state policies requiring the identification of DLLs in Pre-K, and current practices in home language surveys and language proficiency assessments.

STATE POLICIES REQUIRING THE IDENTIFICATION OF DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN PRE-K

As a result of the requirement in Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act¹ to identify English learners (ELs),² 46 states and the District of Columbia have policies regarding the identification of students as possible ELs in grades K-12 (US Department of Education, 2015). However, the Title III requirement to identify potential ELs did not extend below kindergarten. Therefore, few states currently have policies requiring the identification of dual language learners prior to entering kindergarten. In 2014-2015, only 13 states³ and the District of Columbia were even able to report the home language of children enrolled in their state Pre-K programs (Barnett, et. al, 2016). New

¹ The Elementary and Secondary Education Act that preceded the current Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

² English Learners (ELs) is the term used in Title III of ESSA and refers to older children. The term Dual Language Learners (DLLs) is generally used to refer to children birth to five or eight who are still learning their home language while they learn English.

³ These 13 states are: Alabama, Arkansas, Oregon, California, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Washington West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts, and Texas are among the states that have adopted policies requiring school districts to identify Pre-K children as possible DLLs through a home language survey, and to follow up with either a standardized language proficiency assessment or other methods for ascertaining the child's language proficiency in English. Table 1 in the Appendix provides excerpts of each state's policies for identifying DLLs at the Pre-K level. Links to their policies and home language surveys are included on this table.

As is evident in Table 1, there are some similarities and differences across states' policies. All the policies are directed towards school districts and only impact children in the state Pre-K programs under the districts' jurisdiction. Most policies also require that the identification process be implemented when registering for Pre-K, and that it start with a home language survey. Policies differ in what qualifies a child to be considered a "dual language learner". In some states the presence of languages other than English in the home can qualify the child as a DLL (e.g., New Jersey); whereas in states such as California, such a result would only trigger an assessment of the child's language proficiency (Nemeth, 2014). What procedures follow a home language survey indicating the child's home language is not English varies across states and ranges from the administration of a standardized language proficiency test to informal observations and/or discussions with the child's family. For example, in Texas, one of two standardized language proficiency tests (Pre-ITP or Pre-LAS) must be administered; whereas in New Jersey an "individual conversation between the teacher and the primary caregivers" is required.

State policies have illustrated that identifying DLL typically consists of a two-part process: a home language survey followed by a language proficiency assessment when a child's home language is not English. The following section delves into home language surveys across the Pre-K through grade 12 continuum.

HOME LANGUAGE SURVEYS

Home language surveys are the most commonly used method to identify potential DLLs and are typically provided to families upon a child's registration or enrollment (Zacarian, 2011). Home language surveys are used to separate children into two broad categories: (1) children in homes where only English is spoken, and (2) children in homes where a language other than English is spoken. Typically, the children in the second category are then assessed using some type of English language proficiency measure to verify if the child meets the state's benchmark for designation as a "dual language learner".

According to the State Preschool Yearbook of 2015 (Barnett, et.al., 2016), several states report furnishing families with home language surveys at the beginning of the Pre-K school year. These states are: Alabama, California, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia.

Home language surveys are independently developed by states; therefore, they vary across the nation in terms of the number of questions asked, which questions are asked, and how questions are phrased. There may also be variation within a state. While some states mandate that all districts use the same state-developed home language survey, other states allow districts the flexibility to create their own surveys. A few states use a hybrid approach in which all districts are required to use state-developed core questions, but districts may add any questions they want. Despite this variability across and within states, there are some commonalities across surveys. At a minimum most home language surveys ask (1) what language is spoken at home, (2) what language did the child first speak, and (3) what language the child uses most often (Wright, 2014).

Although home language surveys appear fairly straightforward to design and implement, Bailey and Kelly (2011) completed a review of states' home language surveys and concluded that several may be poorly designed. Home language surveys were judged as weak primarily in two areas: (1) surveys containing questions with ambiguous wording, and (2) surveys with too few items to provide enough information to indicate a child's language

dominance and exposure to English. There also are some concerns as to the accuracy of families' self-reporting of children's language exposure and use of languages due to either poorly designed home language surveys, or the family's fears that admitting their home language is not English may adversely impact their child. Furthermore, there is little evidence of the validity of using a home language survey as a sole measure of a child's language background and status as a DLL (Bailey & Kelly, 2011).

Nevertheless, home language surveys do serve a function and they can be improved to provide more accurate results. Several research-based recommendations (Nemeth, 2014; NAEYC, 2005; Bailey & Kelly, 2011; Espinosa, 2015) to consider when designing home language surveys for families to complete when enrolling their children in Pre-K are provided below:

- Ensure there is a significant number of survey items, not just one or two
- Go beyond asking about the presence of home languages; include information about the family's country of origin, child's age at first exposure to English, who in the family speaks English and how well each person speaks English
- Use a "conversational and approachable tone"
- Make the home language survey available in multiple languages
- Analyze the predictability of home language survey data by comparing it with the results of the language proficiency assessments conducted
- Conduct a face-to-face interview with the family in their dominant language to obtain a more complete picture of the child's language use (e.g., Family Language and Interests Interview included on page 81 of Espinosa, 2015)

Home language surveys are intended to be just the first step which then should be followed up with a language proficiency assessment in English and preferably in the child's home language as well (Espinosa & Garcia, 2012). The next section describes some of the measures commonly used to assess young children's English language proficiency.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENTS USED IN PRE-K

Assessing young DLLs using standardized assessments requires consideration of the "unique aspects of linguistic and cognitive development associated with growing up with two languages as well as the social, [economic] and cultural contexts that influence [the child's] overall development" (Espinosa & Garcia, 2012, p. 2). These children do not follow the same developmental path when acquiring English as monolingual English speakers, nor do they acquire their home language in the same way as monolingual speakers growing up in the countries where their home language is spoken. For a standardized assessment to be valid, it should be normed on samples of children who are bilingual and growing up in contexts comparable to the children being assessed. When this process is not used, the results derived from these standardized tools should be interpreted with caution.

In addition to norming procedures, Barrueco and her colleagues suggest some questions states and individual teachers should consider when adopting standardized language proficiency assessments (Barrueco, Lopez, Ong. & Lozano, 2012). These questions include: Are the items culturally relevant and appropriate for the group being assessed? If items are translated, do they have the same meaning across the languages and dialects of the children?

There are only a few standardized assessments of English language proficiency developed specifically for preschool age children. The majority are versions of assessments originally designed for older children. The most commonly used standardized language proficiency assessments for preschoolers include the following:

- Pre-IDEA Oral Language Proficiency Test (Pre-IPT)
- Pre-Language Assessment Scales (Pre-LAS)
- Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey- Revised (WMLS-R)

Less frequently used standardized language proficiency assessments designed for young children are:

- Preschool Language Scales -5 Screening Test (PLS-5) Spanish (English/Spanish version)
- Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test-4 (ROWPVT-4) Bilingual Spanish/English
- Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test-4 (EOWPVT-4) Bilingual Spanish/English

Table 2 in the Appendix contains a brief description of these measures.

Although not specifically intended for preschoolers, the oral language sections of the Kindergarten or K-2 levels of K-12 WIDA⁴ assessment systems such as the WIDA Measure of Developing English Language (WIDA MODEL) and the WIDA ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT) are sometimes administered to children prior to kindergarten, especially if the child is close to age five. Although this practice is used, it is generally not recommended since preschoolers are not the population on which the assessments were normed. WIDA has announced that it "is currently in the process of developing a suite of language assessments for preschool age children. However, this is still in the development phase." 5 WIDA has not provided an estimated date for completing these new assessments.

Most standardized language proficiency tests measure limited aspects of language such as vocabulary and grammar; they don't assess the functional and social aspects of language (Esquinca, Yarden, & Rueda, 2005). These assessments are not able to measure the child's communicative competence in English. To address the more complicated concept of communicative competence, additional and more authentic assessment measures are needed.

McLaughlin, Blanchard and Osani (1995) were among the first to propose a different type of English language proficiency assessment, one that is a process implemented over time, and uses information from various sources. The *California Early Language Development Assessment Process* is a guide for practitioners to use that looks at a child's functional ability rather than simply labeling pictures and responding to questions. This language assessment procedure includes: collecting information through naturalistic observations of the child's language use in different contexts, developing a portfolio, meeting with family and staff to gather information, and writing a narrative summary of the child's abilities. Although this procedure is not standardized, it may provide more valid and useful information for developing appropriate curriculum and supports.

California's current *Desired Results Developmental Profile (2015) Preschool View*, a formative assessment that has met many psychometric requirements, functions similarly to the *California Early Language Development Assessment Process*. One of the eight domains is "English Language Development" (ELD). This domain "assesses the progress of children who are dual language learners in learning to communicate in English. The developmental progression described in the four ELD measures is related to the child's experiences with English, not the child's age" (California Department of Education, 2013-2015, p. Intro-3). Through observations, artifacts, and other types of information the teacher gathers, this online assessment can not only be used to determine a child's English language proficiency at the time of entry, but his or her ongoing developmental progress.

CONCLUSION

The early identification of young children as DLLs and what their language strengths and needs are in English and their home language, enables teachers and administrators to better identify appropriate developmental goals and plan instruction. Identification is usually a two-step process of distributing a home language survey and measuring the child's language proficiency when the home language is not English. However, when it comes to identifying children prior to kindergarten, only a small number of states have adopted policies that extend below kindergarten, even for their state funded Pre-K programs. There are concerns regarding the few standardized language proficiency assessments most often administered to young DLLS, from the assessments' limited scope

⁴ WIDA stands for World-class Instructional Design and Assessment

⁵ This information was included in an email received on January 24, 2017 from the WIDA Client Services Center.

of language elements measured (i.e., vocabulary and grammar), to the samples of children used for developing norms, to the appropriateness of the items. Despite these shortcomings, there is an imperative for identifying DLLs and researchers have suggested a way forward:

- States need to develop policies that require the identification of children birth to five, or at least those enrolling in publicly funded early learning programs (Espinosa & Garcia, 2012). Such policies would make it incumbent upon programs to identify who is a DLL, and what type of language program/interactions would increase the child's chances for success.
- Home language surveys should be re-conceptualized as an opportunity to get to know a child's family, their interests and preferences, as well as who speaks which language in particular contexts (Nemeth, 2014). Doing an interview with the family rather than just sending home a form can increase the accuracy of the results as well as help build the teacher/family relationship (Espinosa, 2015).
- Test developers need to construct better assessments that "consider the unique aspects of linguistic and cognitive development associated with growing up with two languages, as well as the social and cultural conditions that influence overall development" (Espinosa & Garcia, 2012, p. 17). Oral language proficiency assessments need to go beyond vocabulary and grammar to assess communicative competence. These new tools need to be normed with samples of children like the children they are intended for.
- Until these new standardized assessments are available, Dr. Espinosa (2015) recommends teachers "assess their students' English oral language proficiency using standardized tools combined with repeated observation of language usage across different contexts" (p. 107). Furthermore, Dr. Espinosa suggests teachers need to know the level of proficiency in both the home language and in English to be able to "meaningfully and accurately report [children's] language development" (p. 107).

APPENDIX A

Table 1. State Policies for Identifying Dual Language Learners at the Prekindergarten (PreK) Level

State	Excerpts of State Policies/Procedures
Illinois	The district must have families of all children new to the district, including preschool children, complete the HLS by the first day the student starts to participate in the program. The HLS contains two questions. If the answer to one or both of the questions is "yes," then the district must screen the child for ELP. The district must establish research-based Standard ELP screening procedures to determine each potential EL preschool student's ELP level, minimally in the domains of listening and speaking.
	Prescribed Screening Instrument(s): The Pre-IPT Oral English Language Proficiency Test is the recommended screener for children entering Preschool, ages 3 to kindergarten enrollment age as defined in Section 10-20.12 of the School Code [105 ILCS 5/10-20.12] to determine students' English language proficiency and to identify students eligible to receive ELL services.
	Using Scores to Determine Placement: Three year old children scoring below Level D (on a scale from Level A-E) are considered limited English proficient and are eligible for English Language Learning (ELL) services. Four and five year old children scoring below Level E (on a scale from Level A-E) are considered limited English proficient and are eligible for ELL services. (Go to website to see "Chart For Determining Ell English Proficiency For Preschool Students")
	Links to Illinois Policies:
	1. Home Language Survey Policy: https://www.isbe.net/Documents/english-learners.pdf#search=English%20language%20learners%20in%20Preschool
	2. English Language Proficiency Assessment: https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Screening-for-English-Language-Proficiency.aspx
	Link to Illinois Home Language Survey: https://www.isbe.net/Documents/hls_english.pdf (many other languages available)
Massachusetts	Administer the HLS to ALL new students. Districts should administer the HLS provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (the Department) to the parents of all new students enrolling in Pre-K through 12th grade, or another survey that the district chooses provided the district survey contains the questions asked in the Department's version (Guidance, p.9).
	Screen for English Language Proficiency: Every newly enrolled student whose HLS indicates that a language other than English is spoken at home must be screened for English language proficiency. In other words, students should be administered a language proficiency test when the answer to <i>any</i> question on the HLS is a language other than English (Guidance, p.9).
	Initial Identification of ELs in public school Pre-K programs: Districts that provide a Pre-K program must identify ELs. The district must select and use a standardized screening instrument (Pre-LAS, Pre-IPT, etc.) to assess English proficiency for all potential ELs. Districts may not use current WIDA screeners (the W-APT) for this purpose. Once a student is identified as a Pre-K EL, the district must report the student to the Department as such through regular data submissions and provide the supports necessary to overcome language barriers for the student throughout the duration of the Pre-K program (Guidance, p.10). (Note: Table with Pre-IPT and Pre-LAS scores indicating if the child is an "English learner" or not, can be found on p.10)
	Link to Massachusetts Policy: In: Guidance on Identification, Assessment, Placement, and Reclassification of English Language Learners http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/guidance/default.html
	Link to Massachusetts Home Language Survey: http://www.doe.mass.edu/ell/hlsurvey/

New Jersey

The home language survey should be included at the time of registration for all families to determine if another language is spoken in the home. Any child who speaks a language other than English at home is considered an English language learner (ELL), in need of language support in the home language(s), even if he or she understands and speaks some English. The home language survey should be completed by the primary caregiver (with translators available, if and when needed). It is designed to help school administrators and teachers know how to best support the child and families.

Additionally, as specified in N.J.A.C. 6A:15, Bilingual Education Code: "The district board of education shall also use age-appropriate methodologies to identify limited English proficient preschool students in order to determine their individual language development needs." If the home language survey indicates the primary language is other than English, it should be followed up with an individual conversation between the teacher and the primary caregivers to develop a better understanding of the child's home language environment; and to help families understand the school district's linguistic, social-emotional and academic goals for the children. The home language survey and information gleaned from family conversations should also be used by preschool teachers to inform instruction that addresses the linguistic needs of each child.

Link to New Jersey Policy & Home Language Survey Model: http://www.nj.gov/education/ece/psquide/ HomeLanguageSurvey.htm

Texas

Districts shall conduct only one home language survey of each student. The home language survey shall be administered to each student new to the district and to students previously enrolled who were not surveyed in the past. The home language survey shall be administered in English and Spanish; for students of other language groups, the home language survey shall be translated into the home language whenever possible.

The survey shall contain the following questions:

- "What language is spoken in your home most of the time?"
- "What language does your child speak most of the time?"

(Please note: Additional information may be collected by the district and recorded on the home language survey.)

If a home language other than English is used, child's English language proficiency to be assessed using a TEA approved measure.

PreK-1 TEA approved Oral language proficiency assessments are either:

• Pre IDEA Proficiency Test (Pre-IPT) (4th ed. 2009), or Pre Language Assessment System (LAS) 2000/2010 Link to Texas Policy and Home Language Survey: http://www.elltx.org/89 1215.html

Table 2. English Language Proficiency Assessments for Pre-K

IDEA Proficiency Test (IPT) Grade Levels: K-12

The IDEA Proficiency Test (IPT) is an American standardized test that is administered to rate students on their language proficiency in pre-kindergarten through Grade 12. It is nationally normed.

Pre-IPT Oral Language Proficiency Test

Ages: 3–5-year-olds

The Pre-IPT Oral is designed for preschool children who are not used to taking tests. The test is centered around a story and is intended to create a low-anxiety context that enables children to demonstrate their language abilities. This Pre-IPT is designed to help designate three, four, and five-year-olds as Non-, Limited, or Fluent English Speakers. The scoring for the Pre-IPT Oral yields five score levels (A–E). It is administered individually and scored as it is administered.

Pre-IPT is available online and in a paper version.

Website: http://www.ballard-tighe.com/ipt/about/ipt-oral-english/pre-ipt/

The Pre-IPT Oral English Language Proficiency Test is the recommended screener for children entering Preschool, ages three to kindergarten enrollment age in Illinois.

Language Assessment Scales

Grade Levels: PreK-12

Pre-LAS

Grade Levels: PreK-1st **Ages:** 3–6

Language Assessment Scales (LAS) Grade levels: PreK-12

Communication modes: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Languages: English, Spanish

PreLAS® measures the English and Spanish language proficiency and pre-literacy skills of learners in early childhood. This tool can be used to compare students' language skills with fluent native speakers and identify those students who may benefit from special instruction to succeed in English-speaking classrooms.

The preLAS® consists of two English forms and one Spanish form. The Pre-LAS test is a series of "playful activities and colorful materials that help you assess language proficiency and identify instructional placement". It is administered individually and takes about 15 minutes. Scoring is done locally so results are immediately available. Can be used to measure proficiency in English and in Spanish, if Spanish is the child's home language.

Link: http://clas.uiuc.edu/special/evaltools/cl03589.html

Woodcock-Munoz Language Survey-Revised (WMLS-R) **Grade Levels:** K-graduate school

Ages: 2–90+ years

The WMLS-R is a norm referenced measure used to assess language proficiency in either English or Spanish. It measures reading, writing, listening, and language comprehension. For young children, only the oral sections are used. The WMLS-R not only measures language proficiency (e.g., vocabulary, grammar), but it also measures "cognitive-academic language proficiency".

A new version of the tool, WMLS-R NU, with updated normative tables will be available Spring 2017.

Website: http://www.hmhco.com/hmh-assessments/bilingual/woodcock-munoz

Preschool Language Scales -5 Screening Test (PLS-5)

Ages: Birth–7.11 years

The PLS-5 only takes between five to 10 minutes to administer. The examiner interacts with the child and asks him or her to verbally respond to stimulus pictures.

For children from three to eight years of age, the results yield norm-referenced scores for articulation and language; descriptive information for social/interpersonal communication skills, stuttering, and voice.

English and Spanish versions are available.

Website: http://www.pearsonclinical.com/language/products/100000212/preschoollanguage-scales-5-screening-test-pls-5-screening-test.html

Receptive One-Word **Picture Vocabulary Test-4** (ROWPVT-4)

Ages: 2 – 80+

The ROWPVT-4 is a norm-referenced assessment for individuals from the ages of two to over 80. The examiner says the name of an object, action or concept depicted in full-color pictures. The child (or adult) points to the picture representing what the examiner said from of an array of four pictures.

This assessment is untimed and is estimated to take about 20 minutes, but can be shorter since it includes age-related ceilings.

The ROWPVT-4 is co-normed with the EOWPVT-4 (see below) enabling accurate comparisons of receptive and expressive language.

A bilingual Spanish/English version is available.

Website: http://www.proedinc.com/customer/productView.aspx?ID=2699

Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test-4 (EOWPVT-4)

Ages: 2 - 80+

The EOWPVT-4 is a norm-referenced assessment for individuals from the ages of two to over 80. The examiner shows the child (or adult) a full-color picture and asks him or her to name what is shown in the picture. The examiner may use prompts and cues (as stated in the Record Form) so that the child (or adult) will attend to the relevant aspects of the picture.

This assessment is untimed and is estimated to take about 20 minutes, but can be shorter since it includes age-related ceilings.

The EOWPVT-4 is co-normed with the ROWPVT-4 (see above) enabling accurate comparisons of receptive and expressive language.

A bilingual Spanish/English version is available.

Website: http://www.proedinc.com/customer/productView.aspx?ID=2699

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