

Accommodations Guidelines for English Learners (ELs)

*2025 PSSA and Keystone Exams
(revised January 2025)*



**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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Introduction

The focus of the Accommodation Guidelines for English Learners (ELs) is selection, administration, and evaluation of appropriate accommodations specifically for English Learners. ELs are also eligible for the accommodations for instruction and assessment outlined in the general [Accommodations Guidelines](#). See Table A in the general Accommodations Guidelines to learn more about which accommodations can be used for English Learners.

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Definitions

Who are English Learners (ELs)?

An English Learner (EL) is one who:

- was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; or
- is a Native American or Alaska Native who is a native resident of the outlying areas and comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the student's level of English language proficiency; or
- is migratory and whose native language is other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant,

AND

- has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing or understanding the English language;
- has difficulties that may deny the student the opportunity to participate fully in society, or to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English.

Administration

Are ELs required to take the PSSA/Keystone Exams?

(Updated January 2025) The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) signed into law on December 10, 2015, allows EL students who were enrolled in a school in one of the 50 States in the United States or the District of Columbia fewer than 12 cumulative months (not consecutive) an option of taking the PSSA and Keystone exams. A student's enrollment in a school in Puerto Rico is **not** to be considered as enrollment in a U.S. school.

It is incumbent upon the LEA to determine a student's eligibility to opt out. The eligible student will have been enrolled in a U.S. school less than or equal to 12 cumulative months by the end of the current school year's testing window.

PIMS student data will allow the LEA to determine if a student has already been exempted one time for the PSSA and Keystone tests. As long as PIMS data is up to date, nothing needs to be marked and a test booklet does not have to be returned for the student opting out. The label for the student can be destroyed.

Students eligible for the waiver may still opt to take one or more PSSA or Keystone exam. The student will receive a score report. The student's scores will not be used to determine school performance or participation for federal accountability status. Students opting not to take the exams will not count against the school or Local Education Agency (LEA).

The USDE guidance also provides flexibility in determining who can be included in the EL subgroup. Because EL students exit the EL subgroup once they attain English language proficiency, schools and LEAs may have difficulty demonstrating improvements on state assessments for these students. The USDE allows schools, LEAs, and states to include in the EL subgroup those students who have exited an ESL/bilingual education program within the past four years.

All ELs, K-12, are required to take the WIDA ACCESS for ELs English Proficiency Test.

Who should administer the PSSA or Keystone Exams to ELs?

LEA and school personnel should decide the best way to administer the PSSA or Keystone Exams to ELs. It is important to try to reduce student anxiety as much as possible to help students feel comfortable on the day of the test. Having a teacher familiar to the student administer the test often reduces test anxiety and is an allowable accommodation for ELs. Test administrators must be familiar with the accommodations allowed for ELs. See the “Test Administrators, Proctors, PCAs, TSS” accommodation in the general [Accommodations Guidelines](#).

Accommodations

What accommodations are available for ELs?

School personnel should consider the following in determining the appropriate accommodations:

- The student’s familiarity with the accommodations to be used. Current accommodations used in day-to-day instruction and assessment are appropriate. Students are most successful with testing accommodations when they have had a chance to use them prior to the test. Educators are encouraged to implement accommodations in instruction to make sure to address these concerns ahead of the state assessment. New accommodations unfamiliar to students should not be introduced to students for the first time when they are taking the PSSA or Keystone Exams.
- An annual review of the student’s English language proficiency and academic achievement. Knowing this information will help teachers, supervisors, parents, and administrators determine which accommodations are still appropriate given the student’s current knowledge.
- All accommodations should be documented in the student’s file and recorded on the accommodations section of the PSSA or Keystone Exams.

Who determines which accommodations to use?

Each school must involve the appropriate school personnel in the determination of appropriate accommodations for ELs. The ESL/bilingual teacher, the ESL/bilingual education coordinator, other classroom teachers, the test administrator or coordinator, a parent, the principal or counselor, and the student (when appropriate) may be involved in this determination. Identifying the appropriate accommodations should be a collaborative process and should include content area teachers consulting with ESL/bilingual teachers.

For dually identified students, the IEP team should be aware of EL-specific needs and should cooperate in identifying EL-specific accommodations. This determination must be done at least annually on an individual basis and must not be done for groups of ELs.

What accommodations are allowable for ELs?

Many accommodations for students with IEPs, 504s, or other documented needs are also available to ELs. See Table A of the general [Accommodations Guidelines](#) for more information.

Additionally, there are four accommodations allowed only for students who are English Learners. All accommodations are voluntary.

1. **Word-to word translation dictionaries**, without definitions, pictures, or internet connection. This accommodation is available for the Mathematics PSSA or Algebra I Keystone and the Science PSSA or Biology Keystone only. It is not available for any part of the ELA PSSA or Literature Keystone Exam.

- ***What kinds of dictionaries can be used and who provides them?***

LEAs may provide students with word-to-word translation dictionaries and translation sheets without definitions or pictures if students use them as part of their regular curriculum.

Students should be comfortable using word-to-word dictionaries and have used them in the past at school and/or at home. Students should not be exposed to word-to-word dictionaries for the first time when they take the test.

Students may not use a word-to-word dictionary for the ELA PSSA or Keystone Literature Exam.

- ***Do you have a list of distributors?***

Yes. [Appendix A](#) is a list of distributors (provided by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). The SAC is responsible for ensuring that all bilingual dictionaries meet State Assessment requirements as listed above.

- ***Can word-to-word translation sheets be used?***

Yes. Students may use a published version of a subject and grade-level specific word-to-word translation sheet if students use them as part of their regular curriculum.

Students should be comfortable using word-to-word translation sheets and have used

them in the past at school and/or at home. Students should not be exposed to word-to-word translation sheets for the first time when they take the test. These can be used in addition to a word-to-word dictionary.

Students may use word-to-word translation sheets with no definitions and no pictures for the Mathematics PSSA or Algebra I Keystone and the Science PSSA or Biology Keystone only, and not for any part of the ELA PSSA or Literature Keystone Exam. See [Appendix A](#) for free, printable, grade and subject specific translation sheets.

- ***When can students use dictionaries?***

Word-to-word dictionaries may be used by ELs on any portion of the Mathematics PSSA or Algebra I Keystone and the Science PSSA or Biology Keystone.

Word-to-word dictionaries **may not** be used on any portion of the ELA PSSA or Literature Keystone Exam.

2. **Qualified interpreters/sight translators** for directions for all subjects; for Mathematics PSSA or Algebra I Keystone and Science PSSA or Biology Keystone only; not for any part of the ELA PSSA test (except for the TDA prompt of the ELA PSSA) or Literature Keystone Exam.

- ***When can an interpreter be used?***

For any language other than English, an interpreter may be used to present the directions to an EL for any or all of the PSSA assessments (Mathematics, ELA, and Science) and Keystone Exams (Algebra I, Literature, and Biology) **during the first three cumulative years that a student is categorized as an EL in U.S. schools.**

For students in their first three cumulative years identified as an EL, an interpreter may be used to present the content of the test (test questions, answer choices, labels, descriptions of scenarios, and other test material) for the Mathematics PSSA, Algebra I Keystone, Science PSSA and Biology Keystone **only**. Presentation of the content of the ELA PSSA or Literature Keystone Exam by an interpreter is not permitted, except for the TDA prompt of the ELA PSSA.

Note that the Mathematics PSSA and Algebra I Keystone paper/pencil and the Science PSSA, and Biology Keystone paper/pencil are available in printed Spanish versions. (See below for a more detailed description.) It is recommended that this version be used with students who require translation into Spanish. Note also that the Spanish language version may be read aloud to the student by the test administrator, if the student's level of literacy requires this. The online PSSAs and Keystone Exams are not available in Spanish at this time.

- ***Is there a difference between an interpreter and a translator?***

An interpreter works with oral language and a translator works with written language. Another term in use is "sight translator," a person who reads text in one language and renders it into spoken form in another language on the spot. The work that is performed for the PSSA or Keystone is essentially a sight translation. This document uses the

word interpreter to designate the person who performs the sight translation, translating orally the meaning of the allowable parts and subjects of the PSSA and Keystone Exams and/or clarifying directions, orally, to ELs. On the allowable parts and subjects of the tests, the interpreter also interprets students' non-English oral responses into written English.

- ***What is the role of the interpreter?***

Interpreters may have access to the mathematics and Algebra I tests and the science and Biology tests three days prior to test administration to aid in preparation for translating the assessment. Interpreters may access the assessment only in a secure setting; the assessment may not leave the building. Although note-taking is permitted as a translation aid, it is strictly prohibited for notes to be removed from the building or shared with anyone in a way that would violate the security of the test, and the notes must be securely destroyed after testing has concluded. Interpreters must sign a Confidentiality Agreement. Interpreters must be of legal age to sign the Confidentiality Agreement.

Directions for all assessments are provided to LEAs prior to the testing window.

Interpreters may work with one student or small groups of students depending on the test setting. They are permitted to:

- *Translate the directions on the ELA, Mathematics, Science, Algebra I, Literature, and Biology exams.*
- *Translate words or phrases (including test questions) for the Mathematics, Algebra I, Science, and Biology assessments at the students' request.*
- *Interpret students' non-English oral responses into written English for the Mathematics, Algebra I, Science, and Biology assessments. Interpreters must not change the meaning of the response or make any corrections in the response.*
- *Translate the Text Dependent Analysis (TDA) Prompt on the 4-8 PSSA ELA exam.*

Besides the TDA Prompt, only test directions can be translated on the ELA PSSA and Literature Keystone assessments. Interpreters may not translate any of the reading questions. Interpreters may not translate the reading passage(s). Interpreters may not translate student responses to open-ended items on the ELA PSSA or Literature Keystone Exam from a non-English language into English. Interpreters may not translate any of the language multiple choice items or the reading passage(s) and accompanying multiple-choice. Interpreters may not translate student responses to the Text Dependent Analysis essay response of the PSSA ELA test.

Interpreters may not answer clarifying questions that might be asked about test questions and/or test content. The only clarifications that may be offered in English or in the native language are clarifications of the test directions. Translations should be as accurate as possible. They should be literal where appropriate. Where a literal translation might create confusion the meaning should be rendered faithfully but no elaboration or explanation should be provided.

Interpreters can act as test administrators (TAs) if they meet all other TA requirements and complete all required trainings as outlined in the Handbook for Assessment Coordinators. Interpreters who do not meet TA requirements or who have not completed all required training may not act as a TA, and a qualified and trained TA must be in the room during testing. All interpreters should participate in the SAC's local training and sign the confidentiality agreement.

- ***How do LEAs find qualified interpreters and what makes them “qualified”?***

It is up to the LEA to screen an individual's qualifications, including an assessment of the person's language proficiency. LEAs may use formal measures such as the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), which is an over-the-phone language proficiency testing program developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), or they may use less formal measures such as screening by a qualified staff member or other contracted personnel or with a locally developed screening instrument. LEAs may also contract with an interpreting agency. When setting up a contract with an agency, LEAs should ask for information about the process used to screen interpreters and about any training provided by the agency. In any case, LEAs must document the process and/or criteria used to select interpreters.

Keep in mind that the use of qualified interpreters and word-to-word dictionaries is voluntary, not mandatory.

LEAs should try to provide these accommodations to the extent practicable and to the extent that they are typically used with students during the school year. For a description of these accommodations, see the guidelines available on the [PDE website](#).

- ***Can LEAs use a community member, family member, or a paraprofessional as a “qualified interpreter”?***

Yes, however, the LEA must certify that the individual is a qualified interpreter through a local process using local criteria and the individual must follow interpreter guidelines as outlined in the above question describing the role of the interpreter. The interpreter must sign a Test Security Certification.

Interpreters must receive additional training about what is allowable and not allowable on the PSSA and Keystone Exams. It is the LEA's responsibility to ensure that individuals who are deemed qualified interpreters receive the appropriate training.

Family members (parents, siblings) may not serve as the interpreter for a child in their family but may serve as an interpreter for students outside the family unit. Extended

adult family members may serve as an interpreter if the LEA determines that the individual is objective and does not have a stake in the results of the test.

- ***Why can't interpreters translate the ELA PSSA or Literature Keystone Exam?***

A purpose of the ELA PSSA and Literature Keystone assessments is to determine how EL students can understand, or comprehend, English passages, including English vocabulary. Translating the ELA PSSA or Literature Keystone Exam for the student into another language would invalidate the intended construct of the test.

Sight translation would alter the tests in such a way that the translated tests would assess different skills from the ones that the tests have been constructed to assess. Using sight translation as an accommodation for the ELA PSSA or Literature Keystone Exam would therefore invalidate the EL's score.

- ***Why can't the interpreters translate the ELA PSSA multiple-choice section for students?***

The purpose of the language multiple-choice items of the ELA PSSA exam is to determine how well students have mastered English language arts skills, including how to edit and revise sentences/passages, applying English mechanical conventions and the rules of English grammar. Translation would invalidate the intended construct of the test.

3. **Spanish Test:** Mathematics PSSA, Science PSSA, Algebra I Keystone, and Biology Keystone available in paper version exams only.

- ***Is a Spanish Version available for Mathematics, Science, Algebra I and Biology paper exams?***

Yes. A Spanish version of each Mathematics PSSA, Science PSSA, Algebra I, and Biology Keystone paper/pencil exams is available for students who have been enrolled in schools in the United States for fewer than three years. The local educational agency may make a determination to assess students with this accommodation when the student is enrolled in U.S. schools for fewer than three years and has not yet reached a level of English language proficiency sufficient to yield valid and reliable information when assessed in English.

It is recommended that Spanish language students be literate in their native language for this accommodation to be beneficial. However, the Spanish language version of the assessment may be read aloud to an eligible EL student who can benefit from receiving the assessment in Spanish (for example, an EL with prior education in Spanish who is also dyslexic).

- ***How do we order the Spanish Version?***

This booklet must be requested from Data Recognition Corporation during the online enrollment period. To place orders after the online enrollment period call DRC Customer Service at **1-800-451-7849**. Only students who have a need for this assistance are to receive this accommodation.

- ***What does the Spanish Version look like?***

For all Mathematics PSSAs, Algebra keystones, Science PSSAs, and Biology Keystones: The Spanish version of these tests will be entirely in Spanish. Students may access an English version of the same form of the test to use as a resource, which will arrive packaged with the Spanish test. Students may respond in either the Spanish or English booklet, but all responses must be in one booklet. The second booklet will not be scored. If the student responds in the Spanish booklet, open-ended responses may be completed in either Spanish or English. If the student responds in the English booklet, the open-ended response must be in English. The unused test booklet should be returned with a Do Not Score label.

ELA PSSAs and Literature Keystone: There is no Spanish version for the ELA and Literature exams. For the ELA PSSAs and the Literature Keystone Exam, answers must ONLY be in English.

- ***Who is eligible to take the Spanish Version?***

Only students who have been enrolled in schools in the United States for fewer than three cumulative years may take the Spanish Mathematics PSSA and/or the Spanish Science PSSA, or the Spanish Algebra I and/or Biology Keystone Exam. The local educational agency may make a determination to assess this group of students with this accommodation when the student has not yet reached a level of English language proficiency sufficient to yield valid and reliable information. Students receiving this accommodation should be literate in Spanish and/or be familiar with the subject matter as taught in Spanish for this accommodation to be beneficial. However, the Spanish-language version of the assessment may be read aloud to an eligible EL student who can benefit from receiving the assessment in Spanish (for example, an EL with prior education in Spanish who is also dyslexic).

Former ELs who have been reclassified, including those who are being monitored for up to four years, are not permitted to receive this accommodation.

4. ***New for 2025: Translation of Non-Secure Test Materials*** including formula sheets and scoring guidelines for the Math PSSA, Science PSSA, Algebra I Keystone, and Biology Keystone, and Directions for Administration for all tests.

- ***Which documents can be pre-translated and printed for student use?***

Anyone trained as a test administrator may have the following documents located on the PDE website translated for student use during testing:

- Algebra I Keystone Formula Sheet and Constructed Response General Description of Scoring Guidelines
- Biology Keystone Constructed Response General Description of Scoring Guidelines
- Math 3-8 PSSA Formula Sheets and Constructed Response General Description of Scoring Guidelines
- Science 5 and 8 PSSA Constructed Response General Description of Scoring Guidelines

- Directions for Administration script for all tests

Note: These documents are available in Spanish on the PDE website and will be packaged with Spanish tests.

- ***Which documents can NOT be pre-translated and printed for student use?***

No part of the secure test itself may be pre-translated and printed for the student. Students eligible to have the Math and Science PSSA and Algebra and Biology Keystone exams translated must use an in-person translator as described above.

Additionally, no Constructed Response General Description of Scoring Guidelines may be printed for the ELA PSSA or the Literature Keystone exam.

Students may have no additional materials during testing other than the documents listed above and the word-to-word dictionary and/or translation sheet.

- ***How should documents be translated?***

LEAs can find the eligible documents on the PDE website. The translation must be coordinated by a certified School Assessment Coordinator or Test Administrator that has completed test administration training and the PSTAT. No additional text may be added to the documents. The documents may be translated in whatever manner the school typically uses to translate instructional materials for students. The documents must be printed for student use. Online test takers may not access the materials digitally.

FAQ

If students are in monitored status or have already been reclassified from EL status, can they still receive these accommodations?

No. Once a student is in monitored status and is a former EL, that student is only eligible for the accommodations available to non-EL students (refer to the [Accommodations Guidelines](#)).

How does PDE ensure that test items are accessible to ELs?

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is committed to providing the broadest array of accommodations possible without jeopardizing the validity and integrity of the test.

Allowing accommodations is only one way PDE tries to make the tests more accessible. Even before an item appears on the test, that item has already been screened for linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, and other forms of bias. After items have been field tested, PDE staff and educator committee representatives review any items that may not have performed as well as expected in order to determine whether the items should be rejected.

Will these accommodations be allowable every year?

There is a growing body of research on accommodations for ELs. PDE will update this policy as new research about accommodations is published. PDE will inform administrators of any changes prior to the administration of the PSSA and Keystone Exams.

Where can I find more information on other PSSA & Keystone accommodations?

For more information on PSSA and Keystone accommodations, please see the [Accommodations Guidelines](#) posted on the PDE website.

Contact Information

For more information on PSSA and Keystone accommodations, please contact the Bureau of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction, please visit [PDE's Assessment website](#).

For more information on English Learners, please visit PDE's [Educating English Learners](#) website.

Appendix A: List of Distributors for Word-to-Word Resources

- [Amazon](#)
- [Hippocrene Books, Inc.](#), 171 Madison Avenue, Suite 1602, New York, NY 10016 Phone: 718-454-2366
- [Barnes and Noble](#)
- [Bilingual Dictionaries, Inc.](#), P.O. Box 1154, Murrieta, CA 92564, Phone: 951-296-2445
- [Schoenhof's Foreign Books](#), 76A Mount Auburn Street Cambridge, MA 02138, Phone: 617-547-8855
- [Educa Vision](#), 755- NW 47th Avenue Coconut Creek, FL 33073 Phone: 954-968-7433
- [Tuttle Publishing](#), 364 Innovation Drive, North Clarendon, VT 05759 Phone: 800-526-2778
- [Velazquez Press](#), 9682 Telstar Avenue, Suite 110 El Monte, CA 91731, Phone: 626-448-3448
- [The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools](#)
- Offers free printable translation sheets that are subject and grade level specific in a number of languages.