



July 2020

Dear Partners in Education,

The U.S. Department of Education announced on July 10th that the Montana Office of Public Instruction received federal approval to the Montana Consolidated Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to update English Learner proficiency and exit criteria to align with more rigorous academic English language proficiency expectations. ESSA is the reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act and was approved by the U.S. Congress in December 2015. This law provides significant federal support for K-12 programs to serve students and replaced the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

The Montana ESSA plan was developed with stakeholder involvement and received federal approval in January 2018. Montana is a minimally funded Title III state with a unique population of English Learners (ELs). English Learners consist of 2 percent of the total student body population in Montana. Of the total 2 percent English Learner student population, American Indian languages have the highest number at 61 percent, with German and Spanish largely making up the rest.

Montana amended its exit procedures for English Learners; a student must achieve a composite score of 4.7 instead of 5.0, on the State's English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessment, the WIDA ACCESS, to be considered proficient in English and to exit English Learner status. Additionally, Montana defined proficiency as an achievement level "P2" on the State's alternate ELP assessment for English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities who take the alternate ELP assessment aligned to alternate ELP achievement standards. The English language proficiency amendment will take effect in the 2020-21 school year.

Prior to submitting the proposed amendment to the U.S. Department of Education for review and approval, the OPI convened stakeholders to review the exit criteria for Montana English Learners. The OPI selected participants from a diverse group of Montana stakeholders, including school administrators, school Title coordinators, English Learner specialists, Mathematics and English Language Arts teachers, cultural experts (i.e., persons with heritage language expertise with immigrant, indigenous and colony students), and parents. The OPI also consulted with the Governor on the amendment, afforded the opportunity for public comment on the amendment, and considered such comments.

The stakeholder group updated English Language Acquisition and Language Enhancement entrance and exit procedures criteria for Montana's ELs that meet the federal statutory requirement for assessments used in the statewide accountability system and Peer Review as mandated by the U.S. Department of Education. Additionally, the group worked to ensure the exit criteria are realistic for the unique ELs of Montana and based on the most current research. In order to meet these requirements, the committee reviewed historical World-class Instructional Design and Assessment and content area performance data from Smarter Balanced Assessments and ACT.

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