WIDA FOCUS ON Growth

In This Issue

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WIDA® CONSORTIUM

Growth on ACCESS for ELLs®

STATUS & GROWTH

School districts in the U.S. use a variety of assessments to support student learning. Some are required by state and federal law. Some are selected by districts or schools, and some are developed by teachers. They measure academic content areas like reading, mathematics, and science. They measure students' intelligence, physical and psychological capacities, and they measure students' language proficiency.

From these measures, a veritable cornucopia of scores is generated. There are raw scores, percent scores, proficiency scores, scale scores, percentile ranks, deciles, quartiles, grade equivalents, and the list goes on. From this mix of numbers, categories and values, educators, parents and students make all kinds of decisions. Typically, these decisions fall into two categories: decisions about status and decisions about change over time or growth. Status refers to students' current ranking, proficiency, capacity, or ability. It tells us where students are now. This is important to know. It helps us understand where individual students and groups of students are relative to what we are measuring, but it's not the whole story. Status doesn't tell us where students came from, or in other words, how much learning has occurred. This is where examining growth is valuable. Examining growth allows us to identify student change over time, be it change in status, change in proficiency, change in skills, or change in capacity or ability. Examining growth is the topic of this WIDA Focus Bulletin, specifically change in scores on WIDA's large-scale test of English language proficiency, ACCESS for ELLs®.

Types of Test Scores

Prior to discussing growth, we need to first talk about scores, specifically ACCESS for ELLs® (ACCESS) scores and how we might use them to examine growth. ACCESS score reports offer three types of scores: raw scores, scale scores and proficiency level scores.

RAW SCORES

Raw scores are the actual number of items or tasks that students answer correctly. A variety of different types of raw scores are provided with WIDA score reports. However, raw scores are the least valuable type of score to monitor growth. They are not directly comparable across grades or tiers, and should not be used as a primary means to track student growth.

SCALE SCORES

Scale scores are transformations of raw scores. They are developed in such a way that they may be compared across grades and tiers. They are comparable within language domains or composites but not across them. This is an important point! You can compare changes in listening scale scores to other listening scale scores but not between other domain scores like listening and reading. Scale scores comprise a single vertical scale from kindergarten to 12th grade. Because of this vertical scale, scales scores are ideal for tracking student growth.

Types of Test Scores (continued from page 1)

PROFICIENCY LEVEL SCORES

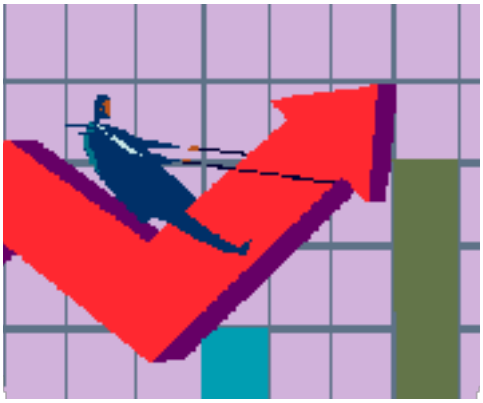
Proficiency level scores are interpretive scores. That is, they are an interpretation of the scale scores. They describe student performance in terms of the six WIDA language proficiency levels. They are presented as whole numbers followed by a decimal. The whole number indicates students' language proficiency level based on the WIDA English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards. The decimal indicates the proportion within the proficiency level range that students' scale scores vary, rounded to the nearest tenth.

Proficiency level scores are not interval data. The interval between corresponding scale scores for 2.2 to 3.2, for example, are not necessarily the same as between a 3.2 and a 4.2. Proficiency level scores are ordinal in nature, like rankings, and are less meaningful for tracking growth compared to scale scores. It is common practice to monitor growth using proficiency level scores, but it should be understood that they are not the best measure for this.

GROWTH CAN BE MONITORED AT SEVERAL DIFFERENT LEVELS: OUR STUDENTS, CLASSES, SCHOOLS, DISTRICTS, OR STATES.

Looking at Individual and District Growth

Research on second language learners has shown that student growth varies dependent upon proficiency level or grade level[1]. Cook, et al, established the following principle when looking at ELL student growth: *lower is faster, higher is slower*. That is, lower grade levels or proficiency levels grow faster than higher grade levels or proficiency levels. This should be kept in mind when examining student growth patterns on ACCESS. In part, this trend is characteristic of child second language acquisition. Different growth rates based on age or grade level and proficiency level are not unknown in the second language literature, and are certainly not a surprise to second language teachers. Thus, we should expect that growth rates will likely decrease as students progress up grades and/or proficiency levels.



Graphs in the center of this bulletin display growth in two ways: individually and at the district level. The variability in individual student growth will be greater than the variability of district growth. Also, average growth rates for districts tend to be lower than average growth rates for individuals. Both types of displays are provided to support interpreting students' (individual growth patterns), classes', schools' and districts' (district level growth patterns) scores.

The graphs on the next page display the 2007 – 2008 growth rates across WIDA states on ACCESS composite scores. Growth rates are provided for all grade clusters. Gain scores from 238,476 students were used to generate these graphs. For each grade cluster there were over 25,000 students sampled. Gain scores used at the district level came from 798 districts across WIDA states, and for the district analyses, only districts with 25 or more ELLs were used to calculate scores.

INDIVIDUAL GROWTH

The graphs display two types of ACCESS scores: composite scale scores and proficiency level scores. Let's first look at the scale score graphs for individual students. Figure 1 displays the Kindergarten growth pattern. On the horizontal axis, there are three sets of numbers. The first set (1.0-1.9, 2.0-2.9, and 3.0-3.9) represents students' initial proficiency level score. The second and third sets of numbers represent an average growth range for students. The vertical axis shows the composite scale score growth range. Thus, students who have initial proficiency level scores between 1.0-1.9 gain, on average, between 44 (Range Low) and 90 (Range High) composite scales scores between Kindergarten and first grade. Students who have initial proficiency level scores between 2.0-2.9 gain, on average, between 30 and 60 scale score points between Kindergarten to first grade.

Individual Composite Scale Score Growth on ACCESS for ELLs®, 2007-2008

Figure 1: Kindergarten
Composite Scale Score Average Growth Pattern

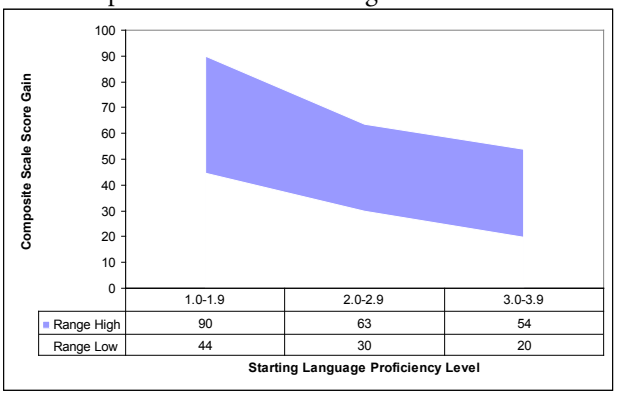


Figure 2: Grades 1 & 2
Composite Scale Score Average Growth Pattern

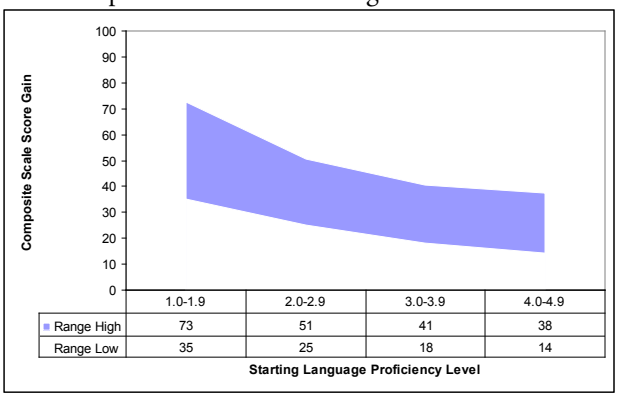


Figure 3: Grades 3 to 5
Composite Scale Score Average Growth Pattern

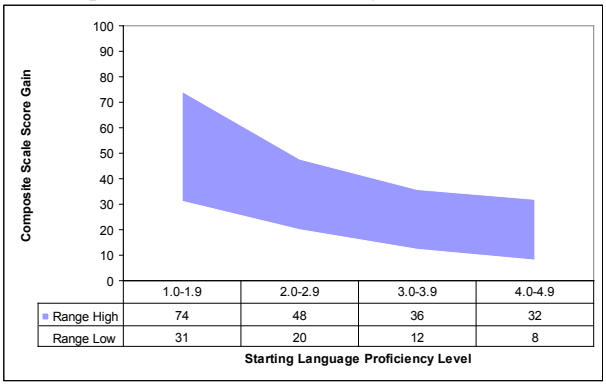


Figure 4: Grades 6 to 8
Composite Scale Score Average Growth Pattern

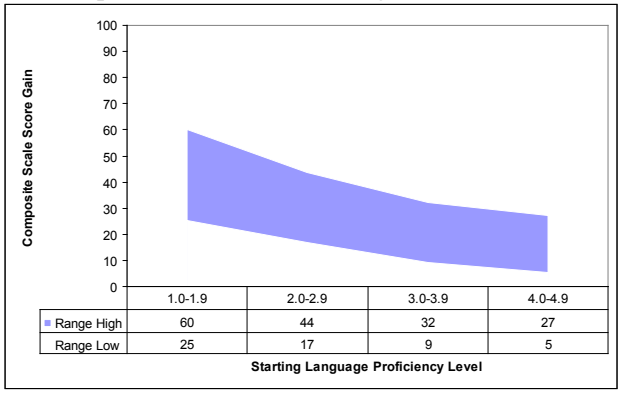
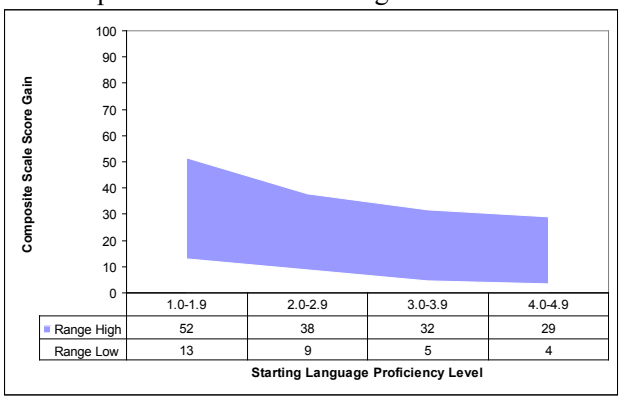


Figure 5: Grades 9 to 12
Composite Scale Score Average Growth Pattern



WHEN CONSIDERING LANGUAGE GROWTH, ONE PRINCIPLE TO BE AWARE OF IS "LOWER IS FASTER, HIGHER IS SLOWER."

Individual Composite Proficiency Level Growth on ACCESS for ELLs®, 2007-2008

Figure 6: Kindergarten Composite Proficiency Level Average Growth Pattern

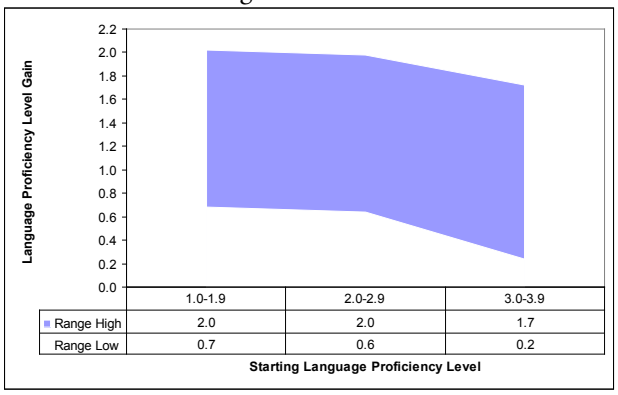


Figure 7: Grades 1 & 2 Composite Proficiency Level Average Growth Pattern

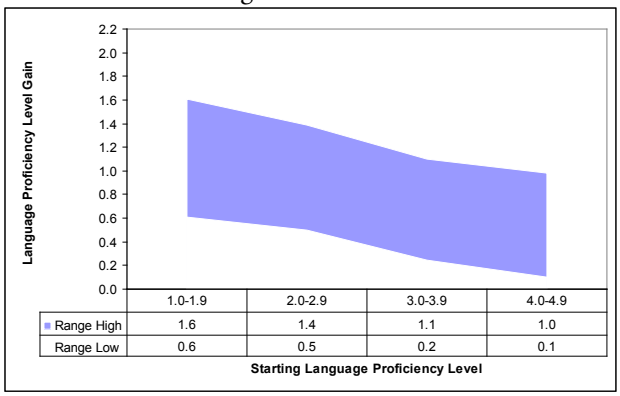


Figure 8: Grades 3 to 5 Composite Proficiency Level Average Growth Pattern

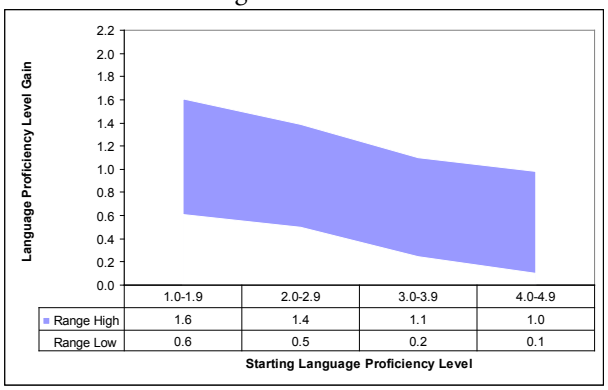
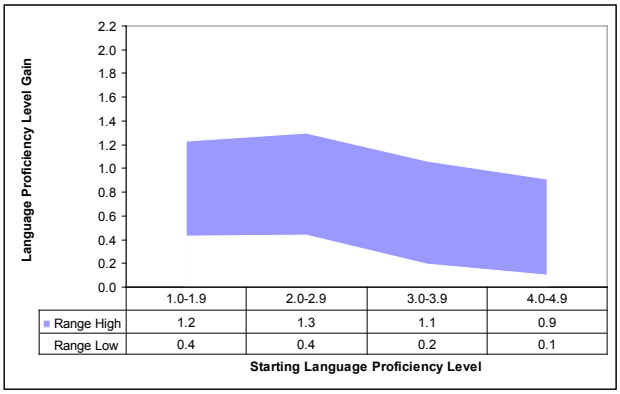


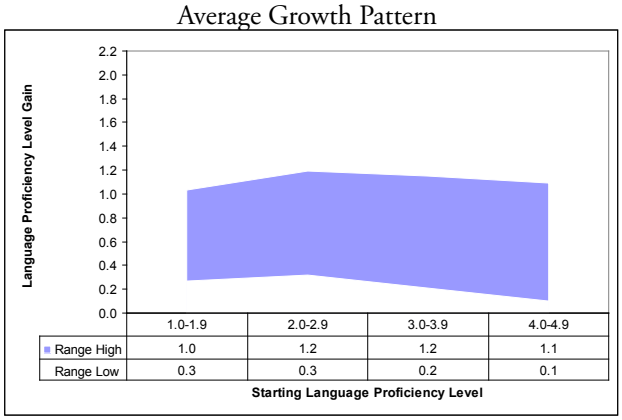
Figure 9: Grades 6 to 8 Composite Proficiency Level Average Growth Pattern



Composite proficiency level graphs are interpreted similarly. Look at Figure 6. This shows the Kindergarten proficiency score growth pattern. Students having initial proficiency scores between 1.0-1.9 gain, on average, between 0.7 (Range Low) and 2.0 (Range High) proficiency level scores between Kindergarten and first grade.

How might we use the individual student graphs? They provide us with a reference for the type of growth we expect from students on ACCESS. If students' growth scores are within shaded areas, they are making average growth. Students above the shaded areas are making superior growth, and those below shaded areas are making below average growth. For those students making below average growth, the question then becomes why? It's important to stress that not all students grow the same! This is especially true in earlier grades. Nonetheless, those having gain scores below shaded areas should prompt some investigation on the part of their educators.

Figure 10: Grades 9 to 12 Composite Proficiency Level Average Growth Pattern



Looking at Individual and District Growth (continued from page 4)

DISTRICT GROWTH

Unlike individual graphs, district graphs do not display average ranges. Also, all grade level clusters are presented in district graphs. Displayed in these graphs are the average growth in scale scores or proficiency levels by grade level cluster and initial proficiency level. You can clearly see the "lower is faster, higher is slower" principle in these graphs. Let's look at the Kindergarten scale score growth for students with initial ACCESS composite scores between 1.0-1.9 (Figure 11). Kindergarten students at this level in districts with more than 25 ELLs, on average, gained around 65 composite scale scores between Kindergarten and first grade. Similarly, Kindergarteners with initial composite scores between 2.0-2.9 gained slightly more than 45 scale scores between Kindergarten and first grade. Figure 11 provides a picture of what average growth in scales scores looks like across grade bands and proficiency levels for districts. Figure 12 provides the same picture but for proficiency levels instead.

It's important to recognize that there is substantial variance across districts, and unlike in Lake Woebegone, not all districts' children are above average. Some are below. That does not necessarily mean that district growth at these grade bands or proficiency levels is bad. Some grade bands and proficiency levels may be below average for good reasons or even by chance. But if a preponderance of grade band or proficiency level growth is below average, asking "Why"? might be appropriate. District graphs are to be used as guides. They should not be used as definitive evidence for either success or failure.

REMEMBER:

- Certain types of scores are better at monitoring change than others.
- Growth across ACCESS for ELLs® grade level clusters and proficiency levels is not the same.
- Growth should be monitored at the individual and institutional level.

District Growth Patterns on ACCESS for ELLs®

Figure 11: District Average Composite Scale Score Growth Pattern

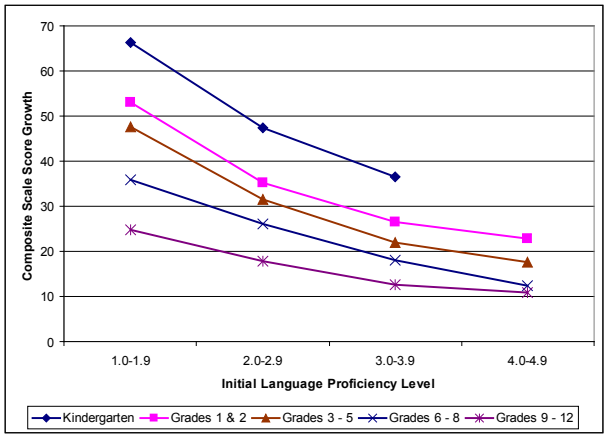
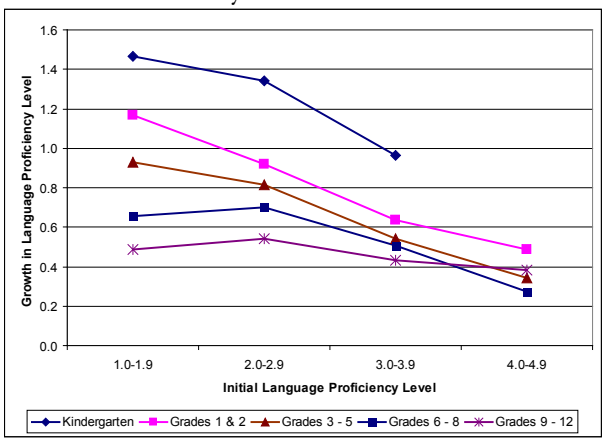


Figure 12: District Average Composite Proficiency Level Growth Pattern



Using Information for Change

Three questions can help us frame how to use information for change. These questions can be used as launch points to you understand, monitor, and effect change.

Where are we now? This is a question about status. What metrics should be used to answer this question? Are there some measures of status that you haven't considered?

Where have we come from? This question is about change or growth. What are effective measures of growth? In order to meaningfully look at growth, we need measures that are sensitive to growth. What might these look like?

Where are we going? This is a question about the future. Where do you want to be in one year, two years? Where should you be? How are you going to get there and how will you know you've arrived?

These questions can be used to help you, your students, your school, your district.

Using this Bulletin

The best way to use this brief is to get your data on status and growth. Get it for your class, or your school, or your district. For growth compare it with the graphs. How are you doing? Are you on track? In the above section, three questions are listed. Using these question, here are a series of activities you can do as a staff.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Discuss what metrics of status you use.

What other metrics might be used to determine where you are now?

How are you doing?

WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM?

Discuss where you've come from.

How do you value change?

Do you measure growth? If so, how?

Where would you get information on growth?

What does your growth information say about growth in your class, school, or district?

What would help you to better understand how your students grow?

What measures shouldn't be used to monitor growth?

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Discuss where you see your school or district going?

When you look at where you are and where you've come from, how does that effect your ideas on where should you be going?

What are some indicators of success for you?

How do these indicators of success support student growth for the better?

Do you have plans in place to get where you want to go? If so, what are they?

How will you know you are successful? What resources could you use to get better?

My Growth Worksheet

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM?

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

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Change is part of education. Learn to harness it!

The mission of the WIDA Consortium Research team is to provide timely, meaningful, and actionable research and information that promotes educational equity and academic achievement for linguistically and culturally diverse students.

World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) is a consortium of nineteen states dedicated to the design and implementation of high standards and equitable educational opportunities for English language learners. Originally established through a federal enhanced assessment grant in 2002, WIDA partners with the Center for Applied Linguistics and MetriTech, Inc. to provide a No Child Left Behind-compliant assessment of English language proficiency, ACCESS for ELLs®. In the 2008-09 school year, WIDA expects to assess about 725,000 English language learners in kindergarten through grade 12 using ACCESS for ELLs®. Research and professional development activities importantly complement WIDA's English language proficiency standards and assessment products.

The WIDA Consortium consists of the following member states: Alabama, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Maine, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

References

1. Cook, H.G., Boals, T., Wilmes, C., & Santos, M. (2008). Issues in the development of annual measurable achievement objectives for WIDA consortium states (WCER Working Paper No. 2008-2). Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin Center for Education Research. Retrieved March 5, 2009 from www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/workingpapers/papers.php.

Francis, D.J., Rivera, M.O. (2007) Principles underlying English language proficiency tests and academic accountability for ELLs. In J. Abedi (Ed.) *English Language Proficiency Assessment in the Nation: Current status and future practice*. UC-Davis School of Education: Davis, CA.