



Georgia TESOL  
 PO Box 17933  
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December 22, 2020

Richard Woods and State Board Members  
 Georgia Superintendent of Schools and Members of the State Board of Education  
 205 Jesse Hill Jr Dr SE  
 Atlanta, GA 30334

**RE: An Open Letter on Georgia’s ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Testing Window During the Pandemic**

Superintendent Woods and Esteemed Board Members:

On behalf of Georgia Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (GATESOL), we have concerns regarding student and teacher safety during the planned administration of ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. If no action is taken, starting in mid-January Georgia school districts will be forced to begin administering this test without the flexibility needed to take all recommended precautions for ensuring the safety of our teachers and students, including our students who are most vulnerable to complications from COVID-19.

In order to provide opportunity for districts to carry out the recommended safe testing measures with fidelity, we urge you to postpone and/or extend the testing window for the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 assessment. The unique COVID-19 recommendations from WIDA require great flexibility by districts in comparison to the typical test administration procedures followed for administering ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. The following chart provides the basis for our concerns with implementation of ACCESS testing as planned.

<b>Typical Procedures</b> <i>from the WIDA 2020-2021 Test Administration Manual</i>	<b>New COVID Recommendations</b> <i>from WIDA’s 2020-2021 Assessment Best Practices During COVID-19 Guidance</i>	<b>GATESOL Concerns</b>
All grade levels and tiers (tiers are the score ranges students achieved in previous testing) can typically be tested together for the Listening and Reading assessments (page 52).	As much as possible maintain the groups of students who are already in contact in the classroom. Avoid creating a testing schedule that brings together students who normally would not interact (page 4).	These safety procedures recommended by WIDA require scheduling smaller group sizes by individual homerooms rather than combining classrooms and grade levels and scheduling all student Speaking assessments individually. These practices will demand more time than the current testing window allows, especially for districts with larger English learner populations and districts whose ESOL teachers or English learners spend time in quarantine during the testing window.
For Speaking tests of Tiers A and B/C in grades 4–12, teachers are encouraged to group students by tier (page 52).	Schools should consider individual administrations of online Speaking tests to help students feel comfortable speaking loudly enough to be heard through a mask (page 4).	
Listening, Reading, and Writing assessments may typically be administered in full classrooms.	When testing groups of students, test in a room large enough that students can be seated at a distance from one another. Follow local guidance on desk or chair spacing. Test in small groups if necessary to maintain physical distance between students (page 3).	



In this context, we are especially concerned for our most vulnerable English learners who have opted for virtual learning. With no virtual version of the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 assessment, these families will be asked to find transportation to the school buildings across multiple days to complete each part of the assessment. For some students, this could include riding school buses where social distancing isn't an option. In addition, given the above stated protocol for only testing groups who are already in contact, virtual students can only be tested in groups with their siblings from the same home. Otherwise their testing will have to be administered individually. This will significantly increase the time needed to safely assess virtual students.

While we recognize that postponing/extending the testing window will impact the time educators spend administering the test versus providing instruction in the classroom, this recommendation provides districts with the best opportunity to follow WIDA's recommendations for safely administering the assessment. While we deeply value instructional time, our priority during this pandemic has to be student and teacher safety. At 6,149 active COVID-19 cases in Georgia as of December 18, 2020, we are currently experiencing more simultaneous confirmed cases than ever before (See [COVID-19 Status Report | Georgia Department of Public Health](#)). With the testing window occurring during a surge in COVID-19 spread, this puts our teachers, students, and their families at an even greater risk, particularly the families of our Latinx, Black/African American, and Asian students. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nationally, Latinx persons are 4.1 times more likely than white persons to be hospitalized from COVID-19. Black/African American persons are 3.7 times more likely than white persons and Asians 1.2 times more likely than white persons to have to be hospitalized from complications with COVID-19 (See [COVID-19 Hospitalization and Death by Race/Ethnicity](#)).

Yesterday, the TESOL International Association published a statement, urging states to provide flexibility to districts during this difficult time (See [TESOL's Statement on WIDA ACCESS for ELLs Testing During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)). Although TESOL International's recommendation reaches farther than the adjustment in the testing window that we are asking for today, we certainly join with TESOL International in prioritizing the health and safety of ESOL teachers and students.

In view of these concerns, GATESOL recommends postponing and/or extending the testing window for the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 assessments to allow districts flexibility to carry out WIDA's recommended safe testing measures with fidelity.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this recommendation on behalf of Georgia ESOL educators and students. We look forward to the board's thoughtful consideration of our concerns.

With gratitude,

*Jennifer D. Pendergrass, Ed.D.*

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