

# Initial Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessments for California Threshold Score Validation Study Final Report

**Contract #CN220002**

**Prepared for the California Department of Education by ETS**

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## Background

The first administration of the Alternate English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) was conducted as an operational field test from November 2021 through May 2022, during the 2021–22 school year. The purpose of the Alternate ELPAC is twofold: (1) the Initial Alternate ELPAC provides information to determine a student’s initial classification as an English learner (EL) or as initial fluent English proficient (IFEP), and (2) the Summative Alternate ELPAC provides information on student annual progress toward English language proficiency and supports decisions for students to be reclassified fluent English proficient. The Alternate ELPAC operational field test supported the development of both the Initial Alternate ELPAC and Summative Alternate ELPAC.

All field test items were included in the standard setting for the Alternate ELPAC, which occurred from February 22, 2022, through March 7, 2022. The standard setting procedure allowed the fluent English proficient definition and the threshold score values on the underlying theta scale to be the same for the two assessments, the Summative Alternate ELPAC and Initial Alternate ELPAC. The Alternate ELPAC operational field test was administered at six grade levels or grade spans (kindergarten, grade one, grade two, grade span three through five, grade span six through eight, and grade span nine through twelve) as online assessments and assessed four domains (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) using integrated task types.

For the Initial Alternate ELPAC, the skills and abilities that compose the domains are evaluated through receptive and expressive test items. Receptive (Listening and Reading) test items are those that require students to demonstrate their comprehension of a stimulus by selecting a response from two or three options; the student is not required to generate any language. Expressive (Speaking and Writing) test items are those that require students to communicate to others their understandings and ideas related to the stimulus using their individually preferred expressive mode of communication. Task types are described on the Task Type Information Sheet for Alternate ELPAC (CDE, 2022).

To develop threshold score recommendations, ETS conducted standard setting workshops with special education educators familiar with the 2012 California English Language Development Standards via the EL Connectors and with the student population taking the Alternate ELPAC. The participants reviewed and discussed the items on the test, the general and specific range performance level descriptors (PLDs), and the knowledge and skills measured by the Alternate ELPAC that differentiate student performance levels. Educators recommended threshold scores for all grade levels and grade spans. The California State Board of Education (SBE) approved threshold scores for both the Summative Alternate ELPAC and Initial Alternate ELPAC on May 9, 2022.

## Overview

The first operational administration of the Initial Alternate ELPAC began in July 2022. At the CDE’s request, ETS conducted a threshold score review study to provide additional validity evidence of the Initial Alternate ELPAC threshold scores that were approved by the SBE. The study focused on the PLDs and threshold scores that would be used to determine students’ English language acquisition status (ELAS) as EL or as IFEP for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

During the study, ETS gathered information from California educators with students who took the Initial Alternate ELPAC about the extent they agree that their students were correctly classified as EL or IFEP. The results provided to the CDE from the multistep process included:

1. Recommendations from the panel-based standard setting, completed in March 2022, using Modified Angoff and Extended Angoff standard setting methods
2. Educator judgments from the validation study

Implementation of the multistep process offered increased confidence in decisions using threshold scores based on Alternate ELPAC results.

## Contrasting Groups Method

Using a methodology known as contrasting groups, educators familiar with students who were classified as EL or IFEP in their classroom were asked to make judgments about the students’ classification based on the approved Initial Alternate ELPAC PLDs (Zieky, Perie, & Livingston, 2008). All local educational agencies (LEAs) that had students taking the Initial Alternate ELPAC were invited to participate in the contrasting groups study.

The judgment of the educators was based on their knowledge and understanding of their own students’ proficiency level relative to the California-approved PLDs. For the Initial Alternate ELPAC study, the focus was on students’ performance relative to students’ ELAS. An analysis compared students’ Initial Alternate ELPAC scores to educators’ judgments.

Note that the California-approved PLDs were the starting point for this contrasting groups study, as well as the starting point for the standard setting study, thereby maintaining the meaning of the performance levels from the two studies for consistency and standardization.

The results of the analyses and educator judgments can be used in concert with other information, such as the results from the panel-based standard setting, post–standard setting considerations, and the impact of threshold scores on the Initial Alternate ELPAC score distributions.

### Instructions for Participating Educators

Educators were provided with the Initial Alternate ELPAC general PLDs describing the range of performance for students classified as IFEP and EL and were then asked to refer to these descriptors. The rating form for each student indicated the student classification based on the Initial Alternate ELPAC (IFEP or EL). Educators were asked to evaluate the degree to which they agree or disagree with each student’s ELAS resulting from the Initial Alternate ELPAC.

### Description of the Study Sample

As expected, the number of students taking the Initial Alternate ELPAC in the 2022–23 school year was small, and the largest group was of the students in kindergarten and grade one. Fewer than 10 students tested in grades two through twelve at each grade level or grade span (table 1). Sample sizes with fewer than 30 students are generally considered too small to allow confidence in the inferences about the group.

Table 1. Number of Test Takers as of February 15, 2023

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Grade Level or Grade Span | Total N of Test Takers |
| Kindergarten | 516 |
| Grade 1 | 26 |
| Grade 2 | 7 |
| Grade span 3–5 | 7 |
| Grade span 6–8 | 2 |
| Grade span 9–12 | 7 |

Most students eligible for the Initial Alternate ELPAC take the test within the first few months of the school year because the purpose of the assessment is identification of EL students new to CA public schools. For the contrasting group study educator recruitment began on January 25, 2023. Once the test administration was underway, it became evident that the small number of test takers in most grade levels and grade spans would limit meaningful analyses (table 1). Small test taker volumes were expected, thus every effort was made to include as many of the students and their educators as possible. Multiple follow-up efforts were made to contact the LEAs by phone and email, both by the Sacramento County Office of Education and the CDE. Recruitment concluded on March 10, 2023.

Due to the low count of student test takers in grades two through twelve, it was determined to use the kindergarten student sample for purposes of primary analysis and consider results based on grade one as additional evidence. Descriptive information on the recruitment sample for kindergarten and grade one is provided in the main report, as is the analysis results for kindergarten. Additional information in the appendix provides a description of and the results for the grade one sample (refer to table A.1 through table A.3).

Table 2 provides the total number of test takers and the number of students by grade level in the study sample. Recruitment resulted in the inclusion of ratings for more than 400 students in kindergarten, and only 21 students in grade one. The response rate for kindergarten and grade one was over 80 percent of the total tested students in each grade respectively.

Table 2. Number of Students Rated by Grade Level

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Grade Level | Total N of Test Takers | N of Students in Sample |
| Kindergarten | 516 | 428 |
| Grade 1 | 26 | 21 |

Table 3 displays the number of LEAs responding to the contrasting groups survey. LEAs were asked to respond for eligible students in kindergarten or grade one. Most LEAs rated kindergarten students only. Across all LEAs, 257 teachers rated students. Most of them—84 percent—rated one or two students.

Table 3. Number of LEAs Responding with Student Ratings

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Grade Level(s) | Number of LEAs  |
| Kindergarten | 112 |
| Kindergarten and Grade 1 | 15 |
| Grade 1 | 4 |
| **Total** | **131** |

Table 4 provides the number and percentage of all test takers in California, as well as the contrasting groups kindergarten study sample by California geographic region—North, Central, and South. The percentages of students who are ELs from each geographic region in California and for the kindergarten study sample show a consistent pattern. The study sample has the highest percentage of students in the southern region, as is the case in the total group of students taking the test.

Table 4. Number and Percentage Test Takers by Geographic Region

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Region | All Test Takers (N) | All Test Takers (Percent) | Kindergarten (N) | Kindergarten (Percent) |
| North | 137 | 25.3 | 98 | 22.9 |
| Central | 115 | 21.2 | 93 | 21.7 |
| South | 290 | 53.5 | 237 | 55.4 |
| **Total** | **542** | **100** | **428** | **100** |

Table 5 presents descriptive data on students in the kindergarten study sample. Based on data available on the Initial Alternate ELPAC test takers as of mid-January 2023, these characteristics are representative of the overall student test-taking population of kindergarten students. In the full sample of kindergarten test takers, 10 percent were classified as IFEP, and 72 percent were male. In the kindergarten study sample, 9 percent were classified as IFEP, and 73 percent of test takers were male.

Table 5. Student Characteristics of Kindergarten Sample

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Student Characteristics | Kindergarten Sample (N) | Kindergarten Sample (%) |
| Students designated as IFEP | 38 | 9 |
| Students designated as EL | 390 | 91 |
| Male | 313 | 73 |
| Female | 115 | 27 |

## Results

Table 6 shows the number of students classified as EL or IFEP on the basis of the Initial Alternate ELPAC Threshold Overall Score and the degree of agreement with that classification based on the educator ratings in the contrasting groups study. The table presents the number and percent of students for whom educator ratings were in agreement (strongly agree or agree) or in disagreement (disagree or strongly disagree) with the student classification.

Table 6. ELAS Agreement for Kindergarten

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Rating | ELAS–EL (N) | ELAS–EL | ELAS–IFEP (N) | ELAS–IFEP |
| Strongly agree  | 156 | 40.0% | 23 | 60.5% |
| Agree  | 167 | 42.8% | 13 | 34.2% |
| Disagree  | 43 | 11.0% | 2 | 5.3% |
| Strongly disagree  | 24 | 6.2% | 0 | 0% |
| **Total** | **390** | **100%** | **38** | **100%** |

Results from the rater agreement analysis of the contrasting groups study for the kindergarten students indicated strong agreement with ELAS based on the Initial Alternate ELPAC:

* Of the 390 kindergarten students classified as EL on the basis of Initial Alternate ELPAC scores, 83 percent of educators agreed or strongly agreed with the classification as EL. However, 17 percent of educators disagreed or strongly disagreed, which indicates a discrepancy. The direction of educators’ ratings for these 67 students suggests that although the students were classified as ELs on the basis of the threshold scores, educators consider these students to be fluent English proficient on the basis of classroom observation.
* Only 9 percent of kindergarten students were classified as IFEP. Of those 38 students, approximately 95 percent of the students’ educators agreed or strongly agreed with students’ classification as IFEP. For the two students classified as IFEP on the basis of the threshold scores, the educators responded with a rating of disagree, meaning that although the student was classified as IFEP, the educators thought the students should have been classified as EL.

## Summary

The standard-setting workshop conducted in February and March 2022 resulted in recommendations for preliminary threshold scores, which, in turn, resulted in performance levels for students who took the operational administration of the Initial Alternate ELPAC in the 2022–23 school year. Subsequently, a threshold score review study was conducted, using a contrasting groups standard setting method. Most of the students taking the Initial Alternate ELPAC are in kindergarten, and the analysis presented in the results focuses on the kindergarten students and educator ratings. However, additional data was collected for grade one students, and the results are presented in the appendix.

Educators considered the performance of students in their classrooms and provided agreement ratings of the classification of their students based on results of the Initial Alternate ELPAC. An analysis of the extent of agreement or disagreement for classification of those students on the basis of the preliminary threshold scores was conducted. The conclusion from the analysis indicates that there is a high degree of agreement among the kindergarten and grade one educators that their students who were classified as EL or IFEP on the basis of the Initial Alternate ELPAC threshold scores are classified appropriately. In 17 percent of cases, there was disagreement, and the evidence was primarily in one direction. Specifically, these kindergarten educator ratings suggested that some students classified as EL could be considered IFEP on the basis of the educators’ classroom experience with the students.

## References

California Department of Education. (2022). *Task type information sheet: Initial Alternate and Summative Alternate.* Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ep/documents/tasktypeinfosheets.pdf>

Zieky, M. J., Perie, M., & Livingston, S. A. (2008). *Cutscores: A manual for setting standards of performance on educational and occupational tests*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

## Appendix

Table A.1 provides a view of the geographic region of the grade one sample of 21 students rated by their educators in the contrasting groups study.

Table A.1. Number and Percentage of Students by Geographic Region: Grade One Sample

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Region | Test Takers (N) | Initial Alternate ELPAC test takers | Grade One (N)  | Grade One  |
| North | 137 | 25.2% | 7 | 33.3% |
| Central | 116 | 21.4% | 4 | 19.1% |
| South | 290 | 53.4% | 10 | 47.6% |

Table A.2 provides a view of the student characteristics of the grade one sample.

Table A.2. Student Characteristics: Grade One Sample

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Student Characteristics | N |
| Students designated as IFEP | 3 |
| Students designated as EL | 18 |
| Male | 14 |
| Female | 7 |
| **Total** | **21** |

Table A.3 provides the number and percent agreement for the grade one sample. Due to small sample sizes, it is recommended that these results be interpreted with caution. For this group of 21 students, there is strong agreement by the grade one educators with the classification based on the Initial Alternate ELPAC threshold scores. Only one educator indicated disagreementwith the classification based on the threshold scores, indicating that educator’s student classified as EL could be considered IFEP on the basis of classroom observation.

Table A.3. ELAS Agreement: Grade One

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Rating | ELAS—EL (N) | ELAS—EL | ELAS—IFEP (N) | ELAS—IFEP |
| Strongly agree  | 6 | 33.3% | 2 | 66.7% |
| Agree  | 11 | 61.1% | 1 | 33.3% |
| Disagree  | 1 | 5.6% | 0 | 0% |
| Strongly disagree  | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |
| **Total** | **18** | **100%** | **3** | **100%** |