



# Future Kindergarten Screener Proficiency Update

By English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (ELPA21)

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# ELPA21 Report: Future Kindergarten Screener Proficiency Update, March 2021

## Executive Summary

### Context: Entering Kindergarten Students and Future Kindergarten Screener Proficiency Update

ELPA21 is a valid and innovative assessment system<sup>1</sup> that measures and provides meaningful information about English learners' progress toward English language proficiency in kindergarten through Grade 12. The assessment system is comprised of a screener and a summative assessment. This information focuses on the screener. The ELPA21 Dynamic Screener is a collaboratively designed, research-based English language proficiency assessment, based on the academic language demands of rigorous college- and career-ready standards<sup>2</sup>. English learners are screened year-round as they enroll in new school districts and register for classes. Performance expectations were carefully set during the development and pilot testing stage of the screener development. A collaborative decision was made to utilize the same performance standards as on the ELPA21 summative assessment so that entering students were held to current, rigorous on-grade expectations. Like the summative assessment, the screener targets four language domains: Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking.

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<sup>1</sup> ELPA21 2019-20 Technical Report, Part 1 – Assessment Overview 1.1

<sup>2</sup> ELPA21 2019-20 Technical Report, Part 1 – Assessment Overview, Chapter 3

Following the debut of the ELPA21 Dynamic Screener in the majority of our member states, ELPA21 state representatives and educator stakeholder groups expressed concern over the possibility that the screener was over-identifying some “entering kindergarten” students as those in need of English language development services. ELPA21 staff reviewed and researched aspects of the kindergarten screener, particularly the “Proficient” designation, to ascertain if improvements regarding the required level of proficiency in the scoring of the Future Kindergarten screener were warranted. We also took input from our ELPA21 state leaders, including listening to concerns about the screener and learning from data that they had collected regarding entering kindergarten student performance on other assessments. From there, ELPA21 staff compiled a cohesive set of options to potentially modify the definition of “Proficient” for entering kindergarten students who will be assessed using the Future Kindergarten scoring version of the ELPA21 screener beginning in August 2021.

## **Purpose of Paper**

ELPA21 recently completed a review of the Future Kindergarten scoring version of the screener and the definition of “Proficient” on that assessment. This comprehensive review resulted in a Governing Board vote to alter the requirement for the designation of “Proficient” for students entering kindergarten, who are, or will be, assessed using the Future Kindergarten scoring version of the ELPA21 screener beginning in August 2021. This report is a summation of the process and outcome of this project. It is important to underscore that the requirements for a determination of proficiency were adjusted for the Future Kindergarten screener and not the depth, breadth, or rigor of the items.

## Background

Kindergarten is a critical year for building the language foundation for all students. English learners (ELs) and non-ELs typically demonstrate growth in language skills during their kindergarten year. Most of these students, however, do not have substantial reading or writing skills prior to receiving kindergarten instruction. Some students are able to enter kindergarten without on-grade reading and writing skills, yet still manage to meet grade-level expectations on other measures, such as a “kindergarten readiness” type of assessment. Throughout this paper, some ELPA21-specific terminology is used in reference to the kindergarten screener topic. These terms are defined below.

First, the kindergarten screener is a measurement of English proficiency for students who are either pre-registering or entering their kindergarten school year, or for students who enroll in a new school district during their kindergarten year and require screening. We sometimes refer to the group of students who are pre-registering or arriving in early fall as “entering kindergarten students.” We refer to the students who arrive at some point after the school year has started as “kindergarten students.” For context, the ELPA21 domain-level determinations chart is located in [Appendix A](#), and the Future Kindergarten and kindergarten screener proficiency determination information is located in [Appendix B](#) of this report.

ELPA21 offers two choices for these scenarios:

- The “Future Kindergarten” scoring version of the screener is administered to entering kindergarten students. The Future Kindergarten screening window dates are set by the individual state agency, and the dates for those windows vary by state.

- The regular, on-grade “Kindergarten” scoring version of the screener is administered at some point after the beginning of the school year during a screening window that is set by the state agency. This window can vary by state and generally extends to the end of the school year.

To provide background regarding the development of the Future Kindergarten scoring version of the screener, we look back at the original development of the screener. At that time, the ELPA21 screener task force members discussed expectations of entering kindergarten students and their anticipated academic development. From there, the task force members agreed upon two versions of kindergarten screener scoring for a designation of “Proficient”:

1. Students score at Level 4 or Level 5 for a designation of Proficient. This follows the scoring rules of the summative assessment and is commonly used when screening kindergarten students once the regular school year is in progress.
2. Students score at Level 4 or 5 in Listening and Speaking domains, and at Level 3, Level 4, or Level 5 in Reading and Writing domains during a designated early screening window for entering kindergarten students. As noted above, this test version is referred to as the "Future Kindergarten" scoring model for the screener.

For both the Future Kindergarten and kindergarten screeners, the assessment questions and administration requirements of the screener are the same; the difference is the scoring requirement for a proficiency designation. States are allowed to use the Future Kindergarten scoring version and the regular kindergarten scoring version, and states determine the dates that each option is available. While not all states engaged the Future Kindergarten option for



the screener when it debuted, those that did primarily used it during fall registration and in the early spring when entering kindergarten students might pre-register for their upcoming fall entry to kindergarten. The Future Kindergarten scoring version of the ELPA21 screener, using the mixed 3s, 4s, and 5s performance levels for the Reading and Writing domains, has been available for state use since the 2018-19 school year.

## **Approaches**

ELPA21 listened to the requests of member states and considered the risks of both over-identifying and under-identifying incoming students. The desired balance sought with a screener is to always be sensitive enough to identify those in need of EL services without over-identifying those who would not benefit from EL services. With this balance in mind, we considered broadening the expectation for entering kindergarten students by adjusting the requirements for the “Proficient” designation for that particular group.

## **Considerations**

ELPA21 explored a number of avenues to improve the kindergarten screener, including researching early literacy standards across our states and investigating other ways for kindergarten students to demonstrate what they know and can do with the English language. We also explored the measure of “Proficient” on the screener and collaborated with member-state staff to create new kindergarten test items that targeted common grade-level expectations for entering kindergarten students. Finally, we researched ELPA21 outcomes by examining how screened students perform in school one or two years after being administered the screener. The research revealed that it is reasonable for ELPA21 to adjust the requirements

for the kindergarten proficiency designation on the ELPA21 Future Kindergarten screener. The options were presented to various ELPA21 advisory and governing groups, including the Assessment Design Advisory Committee, the Research and Evaluation Advisory Committee, and the Governing Board. There were multiple presentations on these options, and ELPA21 utilized a collaborative workspace to allow for ongoing discussions from May 2020 through November 2020 as a lead-up to the Governing Board voting deadline. Governing Board members were provided with a draft timeline for the project that included the deadline for the final vote.

### **Timeline and Decision-Making Process**

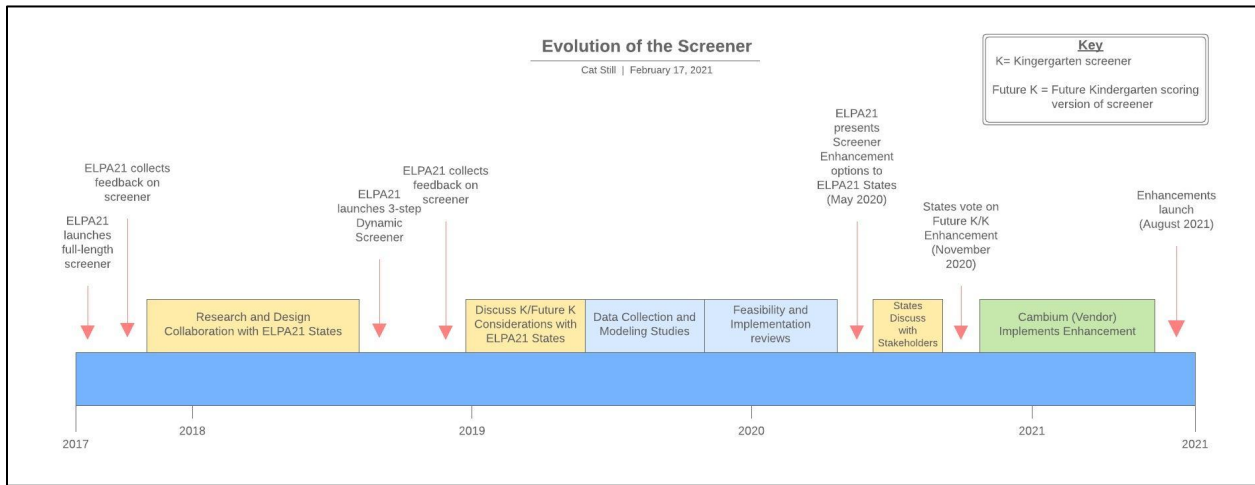
ELPA21 traditionally engages both the designated Governing Board and the Technical Advisory Committee during decision-making processes. For this project, the conversation surrounding the kindergarten screener and proficiency expectations for entering kindergarten students had been ongoing since 2018-19, as seven states offered the screener during that school year. In addition, ELPA21 staff were able to collect data and begin analyses regarding the screener results.

**Figure 1.**

Evolution of the Screener, outlines the process that ELPA21 followed to reach the decision around the updated Future Kindergarten proficiency determination for the kindergarten screener.

**Figure 1.**

*Evolution of the Screener*



*Note.* This timeline outlines the process used to reach the decision around the Future Kindergarten scoring model for the screener.

### Research-Driven, Research-Based Decision Making

As with any high-stakes assessment group, ELPA21 operates under a research-based model to ensure that our assessments meet federal requirements, operate within the guidelines of the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, and are both valid and reliable for their intended purposes. For the purposes of this project, we considered the following research questions:

- Are we measuring reasonable beginning-of-year expectations for English proficiency in the domains of Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking?
- Do we expect entering kindergarten students to have skills in English reading and writing when they begin their formal schooling?
  - If yes, at what level?

- At what point in the school year is it appropriate to expect students to achieve Level 4 or 5 in all domains and be deemed Proficient?

In addition to the two proficiency determinations that were already in use (all 4s or better, or a mix of 3s and 4s or better in certain domains), we considered the following approaches:

1. A “floating 3s” rule: all four domains earn a minimum score of 3; no more than two domains in Level 3 (one of which is always Writing)
2. Lower cut scores: use standard rule (a) but with reduced Level 4 cut scores
3. Define proficiency by an overall score: instead of determining proficiency based on meeting thresholds/cuts in each domain, set cut score on an overall score
4. Minimum 3s (in all 4 domains): minimum Level 3 in all non-exempt domains
5. Minimum 4s (in 3 domains): minimum Level 4 in Listening, Reading, and Speaking only (Writing domain excluded from proficiency determination, but domain is still administered)
6. Minimum 3s (in 3 domains): minimum Level 3 in Listening, Reading, and Speaking (Writing domain excluded from proficiency determination but domain is still administered)
7. Define an additional category: all non-exempt domains are Level 3 or better and at least one domain is Level 3

From this list, approach 4 had the strongest research-based evidence. The research team performed a comparison of student performance on the ELPA21 screener with the ELPA21 summative, an analysis of teacher ratings of kindergarten student proficiency for the students who were screened, and an analysis of student proficiency and growth based on the time of year when the students were screened (e.g., the spring prior to entering kindergarten, fall of the kindergarten school year).

The research showed that entering kindergarten students who register early and who achieve scores that do not meet the standard proficiency definition of 4s or better in all domains but have a minimum of Level 3 in all domains:

- are likely to be classified as Proficient on the subsequent kindergarten summative assessment, and
- perform well on other statewide measures, such as early literacy assessments.

Conversely, students whose screener results were Levels 1 or 2 for any domain should not be considered Proficient. In addition, the Writing domain was revealed to be a key factor in proficiency for the kindergarten students, along with the timing of screener administration: for example, whether it is administered in the spring before the school year, during the fall, and during or after the time of year when the annual summative test is administered.

### **Technical Advisory Committee Feedback**

In May 2020, ELPA21 met with its Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to discuss the kindergarten screener and requirements for the proficiency designation for entering kindergarten students. The TAC's feedback was supportive regarding approaches to allow state

discretion, given the variation across member states for models of EL instruction. The TAC also encouraged caution around lowering expectations of proficiency and also encouraged careful consideration of how changes in requirements for the proficiency designation at kindergarten over the course of the school year would be communicated.

## **Governing Board Vote**

In November 2020, the ELPA21 Governing Board met to discuss and prepare to vote on the issue at hand: Do member states want to allow for an updated definition of proficiency for entering kindergarten students that encompasses profiles of all 3s, 4s, and 5s on non-exempt domains for students taking the kindergarten screener (possibly depending on when the student is screened, at the individual state's discretion)? If yes, which way shall we express that in reporting? The two options were:

- change the proficiency definitions for the Future Kindergarten scoring version of the screener to scores of all 3s or better, or
- add a new proficiency category between Progressing and Proficient that would indicate students as provisionally proficient if they achieved a minimum of Level 3 in all domains.

Consistent with current practice, states would decide when to open and close the window for using the new proficiency designation for entering kindergarten students. During the other parts of the school year, kindergarten students would be held to the proficiency designation of all Level 4 or better on the regular kindergarten screener. The new proficiency designation for entering kindergarten students would go into effect when the screener opens in

each state on or about August 2, 2021. In addition, all member states would offer the new requirements for the Future Kindergarten screener beginning in the 2021-22 school year.

## **Outcome**

The Governing Board voted to update the requirements for the Proficient designation for entering kindergarten students to earning all 3s or better. The November 13, 2020 Governing Board vote was unanimous, with one state abstaining. The August 2021 version of the screener will implement the Future Kindergarten scoring model, designating students who earn all Level 3s, 4s, or 5s to be labeled proficient, rather than the current mix of 3s or higher in only the Reading and Writing domains, and 4s and 5s in the Listening and Speaking domains. Participating states will set their window(s) for the use of the Future Kindergarten scoring model for the screener with the vendor on an annual basis.



# Appendix A

Figure 2.

*ELPA21 Domain-Level Determinations*

<b>ELPA21 Domain-Level Determinations</b>	
<b>Level 1</b>	Beginning
<b>Level 2</b>	Early Intermediate
<b>Level 3</b>	Intermediate
<b>Level 4</b>	Early Advanced
<b>Level 5</b>	Advanced

*Note:* This chart outlines the ELPA21 domain level determinations for all screened students.

## Appendix B

Figure 3.

### *Future Kindergarten Proficiency Determination*

#### **Future Kindergarten Proficiency Determination - Screener**

<b>Proficient</b>	Students are Proficient when they demonstrate a level of English language skill necessary to independently produce, interpret, collaborate on, and succeed in grade-level academic tasks in English. This is indicated on the ELPA21 Future Kindergarten Screener by scoring Level 3, Level 4, or Level 5 in all domains. Proficient students are not identified as English learners and do not receive English language development services. Each state independently determines the use of the Future Kindergarten scoring version of the screener.
<b>Progressing</b>	Students are Progressing when, with support, they are approaching a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level academic tasks in English. This is indicated on the ELPA21 Future Kindergarten Screener by scoring at least one domain score above Level 2 and at least one domain score below Level 3. These students are eligible for English language development services.
<b>Emerging</b>	Students are Emerging when they have not yet reached a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on the ELPA21 Future Kindergarten Screener by scoring a Level 1 or Level 2 in Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking. These students are eligible for English language development services.
<b>Proficiency Not Demonstrated</b>	Students receive a status of Proficiency Not Demonstrated when screening is stopped due to the student not participating. State policy determines whether or not a non-participant is eligible for English language development services at school.

*Note.* This chart describes the level of proficiency at each level for the Future Kindergarten assessment.

**Figure 4.**

*Kindergarten Proficiency Determination*

<b>Kindergarten Proficiency Determination - Screener</b>	
<b>Proficient</b>	Students are Proficient when they demonstrate a level of English language skill necessary to independently produce, interpret, collaborate on, and succeed in grade-level academic tasks in English. This is indicated on the ELPA21 Kindergarten Screener by scoring Level 4 or Level 5 in all domains. Proficient students are not identified as English learners and do not receive English language development services.
<b>Progressing</b>	Students are Progressing when, with support, they are approaching a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level academic tasks in English. This is indicated on the ELPA21 Kindergarten Screener by scoring at least one domain score above Level 2 and at least one domain score below Level 4. These students are eligible for English language development services.
<b>Emerging</b>	Students are Emerging when they have not yet reached a level of English language skill necessary to produce, interpret, and collaborate on grade-level content-related academic tasks in English. This is indicated on the ELPA21 Kindergarten Screener by scoring a Level 1 or Level 2 in Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking. These students are eligible for English language development services.
<b>Proficiency Not Demonstrated</b>	Students receive a status of Proficiency Not Demonstrated when screening is stopped due to the student not participating. State policy determines whether or not a non-participant is eligible for English language development services at school.

*Note.* This chart describes the levels of proficiency for screened kindergarten students.

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