

News Release

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Wisconsin wins \$10.5 million federal Enhanced Assessment Grant

MADISON — State Superintendent Tony Evers announced that the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has been awarded a \$10.5 million, four-year competitive grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop technology-based assessments for students who are learning English.

The department is the lead agency in a 28-state consortium that is working with World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA), housed in the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and five other development and research partners to develop new assessments for English learners (ELs). The project funded by the grant, known as Assessment Services Supporting ELs through Technology Systems (ASSETS), will develop an online assessment system that will measure student progress in attaining the English language skills they need to be successful in school, and ultimately, postsecondary studies and work.

The new assessments will be built on established English language proficiency standards for students learning English. Those standards describe the academic language development needed to reach proficiency in the general language of the classroom and school as well as in the content areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Additionally, the grant will support ongoing research and comprehensive staff development.

“This grant is good news as it further supports Wisconsin’s leadership role in the development of online, adaptive assessments for all students. Language acquisition and academic instruction go hand-in-hand, and the assessments developed through this project will help students who are learning English to move forward so they are ready for college and careers,” Evers said. “We know this grant will have a national impact. The assessments we develop will serve students learning English in Wisconsin, in consortium member states, and beyond.”

“This award is a gratifying acknowledgment of the leadership at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and the reputation for quality that is associated with WIDA’s work and that of our partners at the Center for Applied Linguistics,” said Timothy Boals, WIDA executive director. “We look forward to working with our 28 member states to develop a new generation of technology-based assessments that will enhance educational opportunities for English learners by providing vital, actionable information about their language development.”

(more)

“Language is a powerful force that helps shape our individual and collective identity,” said Julie Underwood, dean of the UW-Madison School of Education. “I am delighted that this funding will allow WIDA and its consortium partners to develop a new, research-based assessment system for English learners in our schools. Following in WIDA’s tradition, this assessment system represents an approach that aligns standards, assessments, and professional development.”

“The WIDA Consortium is well established as the nation’s leader in standards-based assessments for English language learners — indeed, its work offers a model of standards-based assessment for any field,” said Adam Gamoran, director of the Wisconsin Center for Education Research. “The new grant will allow WIDA to align the instrument with the Common Core State Standards and to take advantage of new technologies to produce an even better tool to support teaching and learning for language minority students.”

Wisconsin is a member of two other national consortia developing assessments, which when completed will provide every public school student in Wisconsin access to online, statewide assessments. The Dynamic Learning Maps consortium is developing an online alternative assessment that will replace the Wisconsin Alternate Assessment for Students with Disabilities. The SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium is developing online assessments in English language arts and mathematics to replace the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations (WKCE). All the assessments being developed are linked to the Common Core State Standards and have a goal of determining student progress toward college and career readiness standards.

WIDA has an established history of providing English-language proficiency assessments. Its ACCESS for ELLs will be administered to 975,000 students in 27 states this school year. Development and research partners in the ASSETS grant include the Center for Applied Linguistics, UCLA, WestEd, Data Recognition Corporation, and MetriTech Inc. Member states and jurisdictions of the ASSETS consortium are Alabama, Delaware, District of Columbia, Idaho, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

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