Opportunities and challenges of "the WIDA way" in Massachusetts

DR. REBECCA LOWENHAUPT & CAITLIN HOGUE

Massachusetts ELL Context

- 7.9% of students in Massachusetts are English Language Learners (as of 2013-2014 school year)

- Population of English Language Learners varies greatly across school districts, ranging from 0 – 81.7%

- ELL students come from wide range of linguistic and ethnic backgrounds with a range of academic and English knowledge

- Achievement gap between ELL and non-ELL peers persist

Massachusetts ELL Political Context

- 2002:
  - Question 2 approved by voters: "English for the Children"
  - MA joins AZ and CA as "English only" states
  - Program model: SEI (Sheltered English Immersion)

- 2011:
  - Department of Justice letter: MADESE out of compliance for ELLs
  - Not all teachers of ELLs trained to support SEI

- 2013
  - SEI endorsement required for all teachers and administrators working with ELLs
  - WIDA enters: MA joins 35 other states; adopts WIDA standards and ACCESS test

Study Design

- Qualitative case study design (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2008)

- 12 districts in Massachusetts sampled to include rural, urban, and suburban districts, as well as a range of ELL populations
  - ELL population in these districts ranges from 0.5% - 31.7%

- 30 semi-structured interviews from September, 2012 through December, 2013

  - 8 WIDA staff, 3 state actors, 12 district ELL coordinators, 7 other stakeholders;

  - Interviews were coded by multiple researchers in an iterative, open coding process (Maxwell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment

- Consortium of 35 U.S. states and territories, and growing

- WIDA mission: "WIDA advances academic language development and academic achievement for linguistically diverse students through high quality standards, assessments, research, and professional development for educators."

- Set of ELL standards, materials, and assessments

Standard		Abbreviation
English Language Development Standard 1	English language learners **communicate** for **Social** and **Instructional** purposes within the school setting	Social and Instructional language
English Language Development Standard 2	English language learners **communicate** information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of **Language Arts**	The language of Language Arts
English Language Development Standard 3	English language learners **communicate** information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of **Mathematics**	The language of Mathematics
English Language Development Standard 4	English language learners **communicate** information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of **Science**	The language of Science
English Language Development Standard 5	English language learners **communicate** information, ideas and concepts necessary for academic success in the content area of **Social Studies**	The language of Social Studies

Source: WIDA website, http://www.wida.us/aboutus/mission.aspx

WIDA History

- Emerged as response to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the requirement to assess all students in particular grades and subjects

  - Wisconsin: multiple and varied assessment for ELL students creating challenges; creators of WIDA decided to make their own assessment for ELLs to ease challenges

- Creators co-wrote federal grant for assessment development in collaboration with the Center for Applied Linguistics in 2003

  - First states to utilize the assessment were Wisconsin, Delaware, and Arkansas (WIDA)

WIDA History

- Standards developed by 2004
  - Vision to create a user-friendly, aligned system for teachers

- First assessment administered by 2005

- WIDA moved to a university for the research capacity and potential outreach to teachers

- Non-profit consortium of states

- Large growth in states in the consortium led to a name change

WIDA's core premise

"The underlying premise behind the WIDA standards, which is the core of what we do at WIDA, is that academic language is an element of all of the content areas and the discourse that revolves around them. The development and the organization of the WIDA standards are an intention to support that opinion, that focus."

(WIDA actor)

WIDA's Standards-based System

Components of WIDA's Standards-based System	
Standards-based Component	**Distinguishing Feature**
Strands of Model Performance Indicators as representative of the WIDA English Language Proficiency Standards	Illustrate how English language learners process and use language for each English language **proficiency standard**, **language domain**, and language proficiency **level** *by grade level cluster*
Performance Definitions	Outline how English language learners process and use language for each **level of** language proficiency *in grades K-12*
Can Do Descriptors	Describe how English language learners process and use language for each **language domain** and level of language proficiency *by grade level cluster*
Speaking and Writing Rubrics	Document how English language learners process and use language in the domain of **speaking** or **writing** for each **level** of language proficiency based on three criteria: linguistic complexity, vocabulary usage, and language control *in grades K-12*

Source: The English Language Learner Can Do Booklet: Grades 3-5, WIDA Consortium (2012).

Model Performance Indicators

Figure 3C: A Strand of Model Performance Indicators with an Example Genre

Level 1 Entering	Level 2 Beginning	Level 3 Developing	Level 4 Expanding	Level 5 Bridging
Identify words or phrases associated with adventures using visual support and word/phrase walls or banks	Answer WH-questions related to adventures using visual support (e.g., "Who is missing?") and share with a peer	Sequence plots of adventures using visual support and share with a peer	Summarize plots of adventures using visual support and share with a peer	Identify cause and effect of events on characters in adventure stories

Standards Reference
Framework: Formative
Standard: 2- The language of Language Arts
Grade level cluster: 6-8

Language domain: Reading
Example genre: Adventures

Source: English Language Proficiency Standards and Resource Guide: 2007 Edition, WIDA Consortium (2012).

Can Do Descriptors

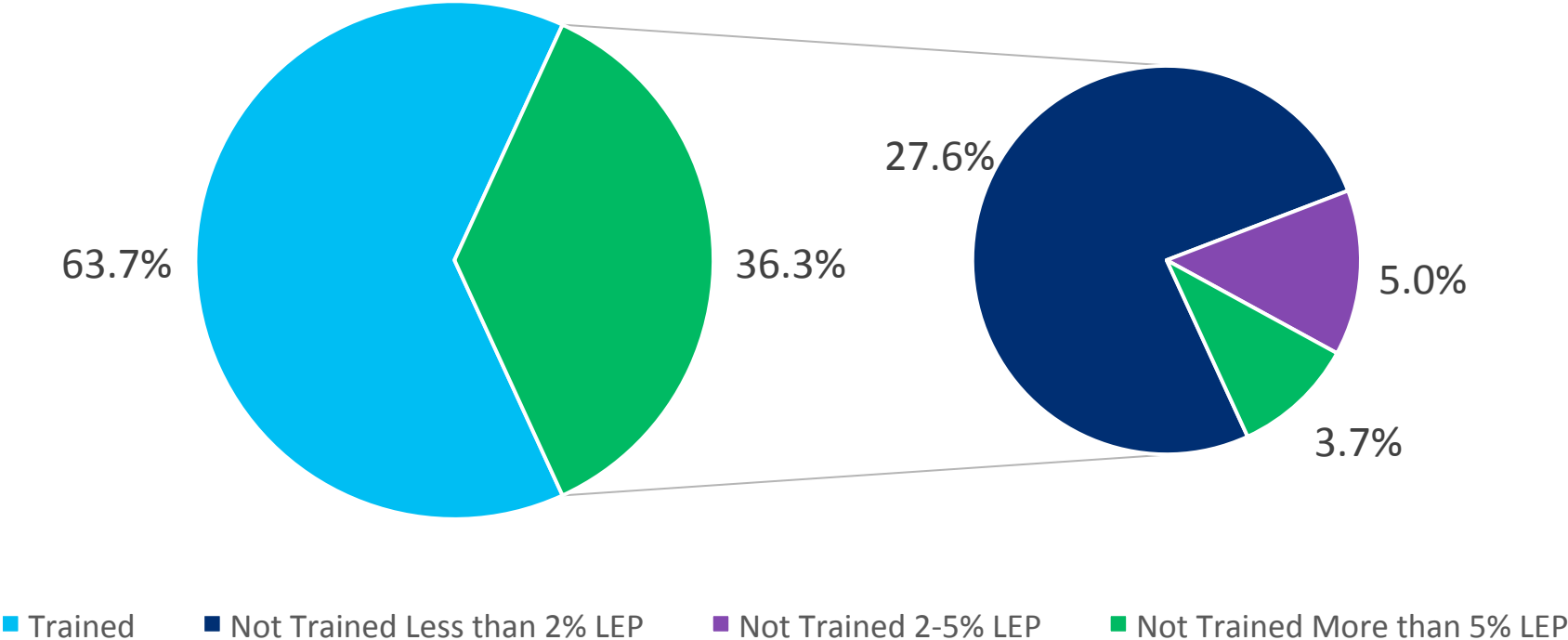|	Level 1 Entering	Level 2 Beginning	Level 3 Developing	Level 4 Expanding	Level 5 Bridging	
LISTENING	• Point to stated pictures, words, or phrases • Follow one-step oral directions (e.g., physically or through drawings) • Identify objects, figures, people from oral statements or questions (e.g., "Which one is a rock?") • Match classroom oral language to daily routines	• Categorize content-based pictures or objects from oral descriptions • Arrange pictures or objects per oral information • Follow two-step oral directions • Draw in response to oral descriptions • Evaluate oral information (e.g., about lunch options)	• Follow multi-step oral directions • Identify illustrated main ideas from paragraph-level oral discourse • Match literal meanings of oral descriptions or oral reading to illustrations • Sequence pictures from oral stories, processes, or procedures	• Interpret oral information and apply to new situations • Identify illustrated main ideas and supporting details from oral discourse • Infer from and act on oral information • Role play the work of authors, mathematicians, scientists, historians from oral readings, videos, or multi-media	• Carry out oral instructions containing grade-level, content-based language • Construct models or use manipulatives to problem-solve based on oral discourse • Distinguish between literal and figurative language in oral discourse • Form opinions of people, places, or ideas from oral scenarios	**Level 6 - Reaching**
SPEAKING	• Express basic needs or conditions • Name pre-taught objects, people, diagrams, or pictures • Recite words or phrases from pictures of everyday objects and oral modeling • Answer yes/no and choice questions	• Ask simple, everyday questions (e.g., "Who is absent?") • Restate content-based facts • Describe pictures, events, objects, or people using phrases or short sentences • Share basic social information with peers	• Answer simple content-based questions • Re/tell short stories or events • Make predictions or hypotheses from discourse • Offer solutions to social conflict • Present content-based information • Engage in problem-solving	• Answer opinion questions with supporting details • Discuss stories, issues, and concepts • Give content-based oral reports • Offer creative solutions to issues/problems • Compare/contrast content-based functions and relationships	• Justify/defend opinions or explanations with evidence • Give content-based presentations using technical vocabulary • Sequence steps in grade-level problem-solving • Explain in detail results of inquiry (e.g., scientific experiments)	

Source: The English Language Learner Can Do Booklet: Grades 3-5, WIDA Consortium (2012).
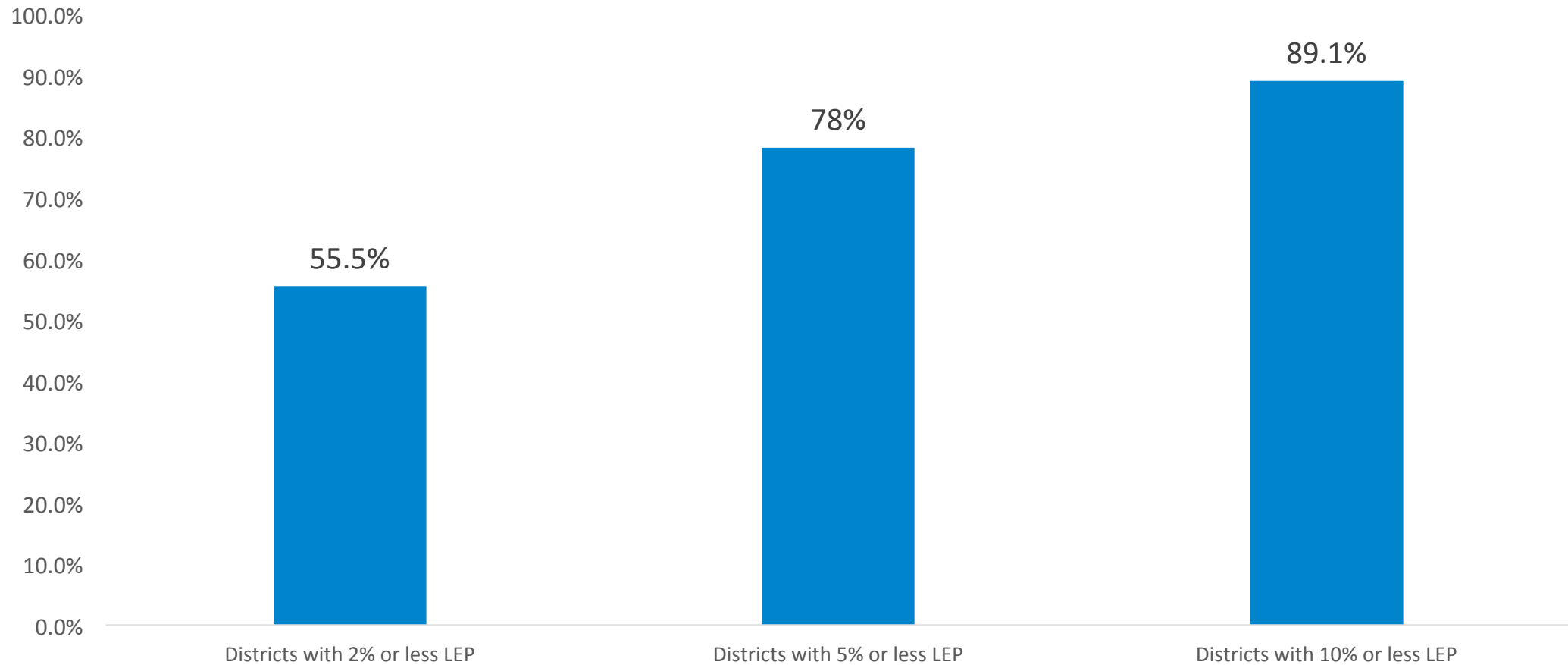
Implementation

- MA adopted WIDA, Fall, 2012

- Initial ACCESS administration, Winter, 2013

- State trainings initially focused on preparing for assessment

- Later trainings focused on standards and curriculum development

State Implementation: through summer 2013

Trained and untrained districts in Massachusetts

63.7%   36.3%   27.6%   5.0%   3.7%

■ Trained   ■ Not Trained Less than 2% LEP   ■ Not Trained 2-5% LEP   ■ Not Trained More than 5% LEP

Attending districts by LEP percentage

Implementation: Multiple initiatives

- Districts unfolding multiple reforms
  - MA Teacher Evaluation System
  - District Determined Measures
  - Common Core & PARCC Assessment

- Concurrent with RETELL Initiative & SEI endorsement courses
  - "If you're taking the SEI endorsement course, you don't need more PDPs of ESL
  'til the next recertification cycle, so why take the WIDA training course?" (District Actor)

Implementation: Large-scale reform, few resources

"It's an astronomically big undertaking...They (WIDA) kind of maneuver you up to the starting line, and then give you a bunch of—give you liquid to drink on your marathon. They give you some trail mix to chew. Then they say, "Go for it. Here's the race. Run." I think that ultimately is really not enough, because the very running of the race is what the challenge is, not layout the course." (External Actor)

"We're often in that position where we know what needs to happen but no one's giving us the time or the resources to do it in a group, or when it's alone it's stressful." (District actor)

Implementation: No clear directives

- "I think they [WIDA] have a great philosophy, but I also think that their feeling is that each state is going to do it their own way." (District actor)

- "I think the big frustration is that WIDA doesn't give you anything on how to transform these notions into your school…" (District actor)

- "The more I learn, the more confused I feel…" (District actor)

Implementation: A framework, not standards

- "The other big message I give them right in the very beginning, that WIDA is not a program. It's an overlay of the Common Core, so if you're taking your content standards from Common Core, you're taking your language standards from WIDA." (District actor)

- "WIDA's a really different approach to standards and it can't live on its own. I'm hoping that this approach will infuse language development in all of the content areas that they're studying." (District actor)

"The WIDA way"

- "The very nature of the WIDA standards is that they are articulated by five different skill (content) areas" (WIDA actor)

- Language assessed in 4 domains: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing

- Not a traditional set of standards, with specified skills & knowledge

- Goal is to facilitate curriculum development around language

- Support collaborative practice around instruction for ELLs and creating a shared vision of instruction for ELLs

"The WIDA way": An asset-based approach

- WIDA is based on an asset-based approach to build on prior knowledge and language skill

- "The concern I have about states that have English only is, they don't tend to identify English language learners as kids with a can-do philosophy… 'You don't have this and therefore you need it.'" (WIDA actor)

The WIDA way: Language across content areas

- "The underlying premise behind the WIDA standards, which is the core of what we do at WIDA, is that academic language is an element of all of the content areas and the discourse that revolves around them. The development and the organization of the WIDA standards are an intention to support that opinion, that focus." (WIDA actor)

- "How do you get these people [general educators] who don't believe that they're language teachers to be language teachers?" (District actor)

- "Before, the kids didn't have to know the language of science and the language of math. It was just English." (State actor, describing previous ELL assessment)

"The WIDA way": Collaboration for ELLs

- "I know that that's what WIDA says, it's for everybody. It's going to take forever for that to be adopted as a general education issue here…You know it's—I don't want to have to be—you know it's like the teachers idea of, 'I've got enough to do. I don't need to worry about those kids.' There'll be individual teachers who will, and they'll do it very well, but there are teachers who could care less." (State actor)

- "This is not as clear [as prior standards] and it's not an ESL curriculum. They're ELD standards, but they're really meant for the classroom teacher." (District actor)

Implications

Opportunities

- Adoption presents an opportunity for adaptive change, as opposed to technical change (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997)

- More fully integrate ELL instruction into schooling

- Potential to support instructional improvement & academic language development for ELLs

Challenges

- Confusion about what exactly WIDA requires has lead to wide variation in implementation efforts

- Lack of resources to support learning about the reform and little direction from the state

- In the context of multiple initiatives, WIDA adoption viewed as an add-on or burden

Thoughts & Reflections

What have your experiences with WIDA been?

What presented here resonates with your own experiences? What's missing?

What resources or support might better help you in your implementation efforts?

Model Performance Indicators (MPI)

Source: 2012 Amplification of the English Language Development Standards: Kindergarten to Grade 12, WIDA Consortium (2012).

Performance Definitions

At the given level of English language proficiency, English language learners will process, understand, produce, or use:

6 Reaching	• specialized or technical language reflective of the content areas at grade level • a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in extended oral or written discourse as required by the specified grade level • oral or written communication in English comparable to English-proficient peers
5 Bridging	• specialized or technical language of the content areas • a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in extended oral or written discourse, including stories, essays, or reports • oral or written language approaching comparability to that of English-proficient peers when presented with grade-level material
4 Expanding	• specific and some technical language of the content areas • a variety of sentence lengths of varying linguistic complexity in oral discourse or multiple, related sentences, or paragraphs • oral or written language with minimal phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that do not impede the overall meaning of the communication when presented with oral or written connected discourse with sensory, graphic, or interactive support
3 Developing	• general and some specific language of the content areas • expanded sentences in oral interaction or written paragraphs • oral or written language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that may impede the communication, but retain much of its meaning, when presented with oral or written, narrative, or expository descriptions with sensory, graphic, or interactive support
2 Beginning	• general language related to the content areas • phrases or short sentences • oral or written language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that often impede the meaning of the communication when presented with one- to multiple-step commands, directions, questions, or a series of statements with sensory, graphic, or interactive support
1 Entering	• pictorial or graphic representation of the language of the content areas • words, phrases, or chunks of language when presented with one-step commands, directions, WH-, choice, or yes/no questions, or statements with sensory, graphic, or interactive support • oral language with phonological, syntactic, or semantic errors that often impede meaning when presented with basic oral commands, direct questions, or simple statements with sensory, graphic, or interactive support

Source: The English Language Learner Can Do Booklet: Grades 3-5, WIDA Consortium (2012).

Training attendees by teacher position