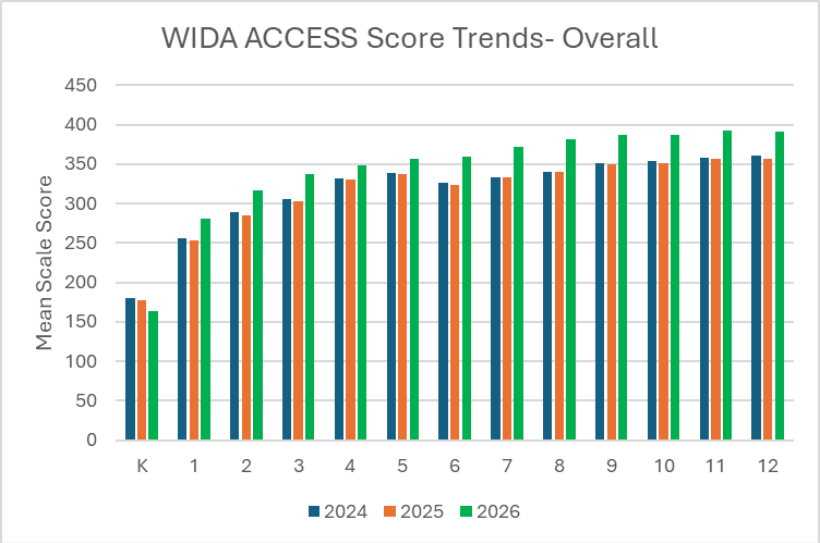
2026 WIDA ACCESS Score Change Analysis and Impact on 2026 Performance Frameworks

This year, WIDA implemented several changes to the ACCESS assessment. CDE's Assessment and Accountability Analytics staff investigated changes in state-wide WIDA score trends in 2026 and consulted with the TAP on appropriate usage for growth and performance framework calculations. The resulting decisions are to continue calculating regular growth for 2026 while removing On Track Growth from the fall 2026 frameworks. This document summarizes the analytic evidence behind these decisions.

Scale Scores

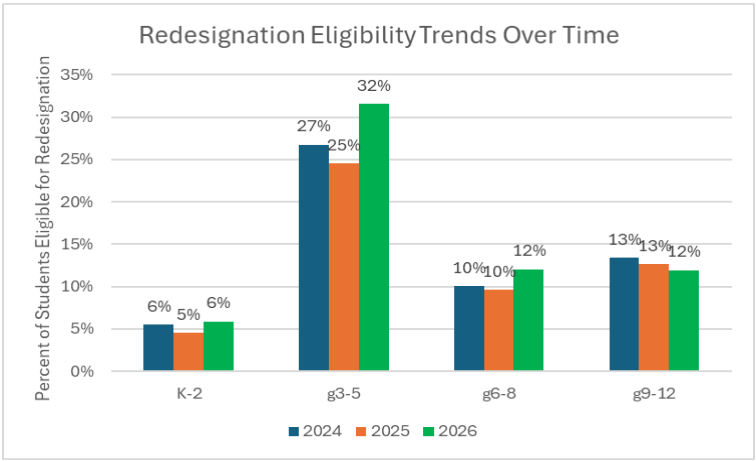
The spring 2026 WIDA ACCESS scale scores are higher than expected, most likely due to adding the rebuilt Kindergarten test onto the existing g1-12 vertical scale. WIDA communicated that these adjustments would have minimal impact on student scores, but the Interpretive Guide released with the recent results stated that 2026 scale scores cannot be compared to previous years and will need to be re-baselined moving forward.

Aside from a modest drop in kindergarten scores, CDE found that WIDA Overall mean scale scores increased between 17 to 41 points for 2026, depending upon the grade level and cluster. The graph at right shows state-wide Overall mean scores across years, with 2024 and 2025 results staying similar (1-3 point change) across grades, while 2026 (green) results show increases across grades 1-5, and somewhat larger increases for grades 8-12. Given these score changes in the context of WIDA adjusting the underlying vertical scale for 2026, changes are likely due to the scale revision.



Proficiency Levels

To ensure comparability with previous proficiency level expectations, WIDA separately scaled consortium-wide 2026 ACCESS results onto the old proficiency level scale. This means a student scoring a 2.5 in previous years, would still be expected to score a 2.5 in the current year and we can apply the same interpretation as in the past to proficiency levels. This also means ML redesignation decisions this summer should be made using the existing performance levels of 4.0 Overall and 4.0 Literacy. WIDA will be holding a standard setting and publishing revised performance levels in the fall of 2026, which should be applied to ML redesignation decisions starting in spring 2027.



Applying the 2016 performance expectations to the spring 2026 WIDA data results in slightly higher redesignation eligibility rates compared to 2025 and 2024, for some grades. The graph above shows the proportions of ML students eligible for redesignation. Educators making redesignation decisions should also consider a local body of evidence to ensure a student's readiness to receive instruction without ELD support.

Growth and On Track Growth

One of the advantages of the normative Colorado Growth Model is that calculations are scale independent and only require that relative rankings of students stay consistent over the years, making the model resilient to changes in assessments. The easiest way to characterize this ranking relationship is to compare the correlations of student-level scale scores between 2024 to 2025 and 2025 to 2026.

The table at left shows that for most grades the correlations are still around 0.8, indicating strong consistency in student rankings, although g1-2 and g5-6 show slightly weaker relationships this year. Given this stability in normative rankings, both CDE staff and TAP support running Student Growth Percentile (SGP) calculations for 2026.

In contrast to these purely normative growth calculations, On Track Growth (OTG) is dependent upon the scale scores and proficiency cuts staying the same between years. OTG leverages historical patterns of year-to-year scale score change to project the future growth trajectory required to attain a target level of proficiency within a given timeframe. A student's observed growth is compared to the future growth trajectory to determine if they are on or off track to meet their target. Since this calculation depends on historical scale score change, it cannot be used to project future trajectories if the underlying assessment scales shifted. For this reason, both CDE and TAP support pausing OTG for 2026 and resuming calculations in 2027 when the state has two consecutive years of data on the new WIDA vertical scale.

ACCESS Overall Scale Score Correlations

	2024 to 2025	2025 to 2026	Difference
gK to g1	0.723	0.705	-0.018
g1 to g2	0.796	0.769	-0.027
g2 to g3	0.812	0.805	-0.007
g3 to g4	0.804	0.793	-0.011
g4 to g5	0.814	0.806	-0.008
g5 to g6	0.785	0.762	-0.023
g6 to g7	0.819	0.808	-0.011
g7 to g8	0.841	0.828	-0.013
g8 to g9	0.808	0.805	-0.003
g9 to g10	0.819	0.815	-0.004
g10 to g11	0.798	0.799	0.001
g11 to g12	0.746	0.756	0.01

Performance Framework Impacts

As described above, CDE will calculate ELP growth for 2026 but not OTG. As both metrics are currently included in the School and District Performance Frameworks, the 2 points currently assigned to ELP OTG will be removed. Instead, ELP Growth will be increased by 2 points for a total of 4 points. To estimate the effect of removing OTG, 2025 performance framework data were used to simulate what ratings would have looked like if WIDA growth was used in lieu of On Track growth. Analysis demonstrated that nearly all districts and schools would have earned identical ratings, indicating this change will minimally impact 2026 framework results.

Developed in consultation with the TAP, the 2026 approach to ELP growth preserves the consistency and stability of accountability framework calculations while addressing the methodological limitations of ELP OTG and the observed changes to WIDA scale scores. This approach reflects CDE's commitment to maintaining valid, reliable, and equitable school and district performance framework calculations while minimizing disruptions to year-over-year results.