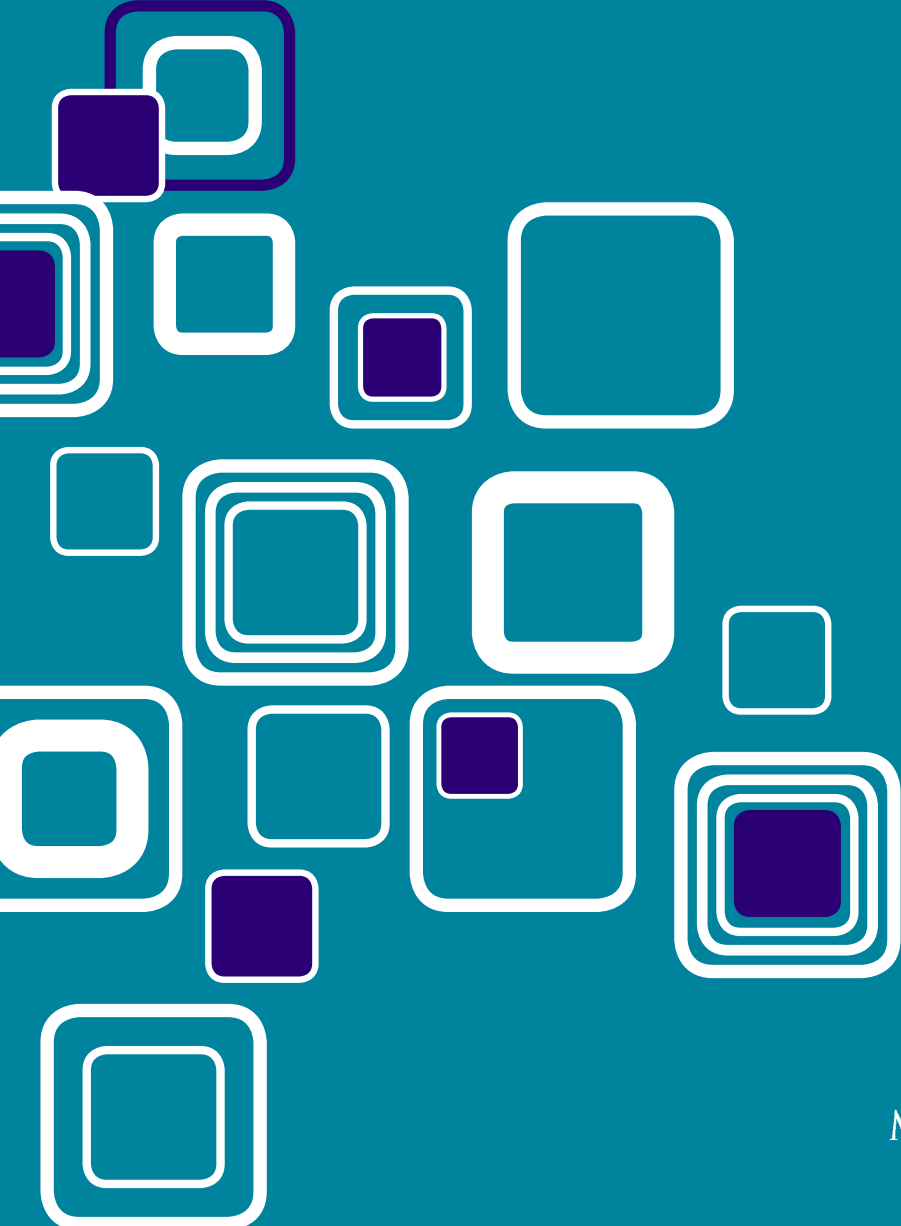

THE EDUCATIONAL TRAJECTORIES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN TEXAS

By Stella M. Flores, Jeanne Batalova, and Michael Fix



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The dataset used for this analysis was obtained from the University of Texas at Dallas Education Research Center (UTD-ERC). The data include administrative records from the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

The conclusions of this research do not necessarily reflect the opinions or official position of the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, or the state of Texas.

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Executive Summary

About 5.3 million English Language Learners (ELLs) — students whose primary language is not English and whose English language skills are not sufficient to keep up with classes conducted only in English — are enrolled in PK-12 public schools across the United States. The number of these students increased dramatically in ten years, from 3.5 million in the school year (SY) 1998-99 to 5.3 million in 2008-09, reflecting broader national demographic and immigration trends.¹

One in nine of today's public school students face the task of learning English. The educational outcomes for these students can either translate into a more productive, multilingual workforce or higher levels of academic failure and dropouts, with the attendant social costs. As the number and share of such students have grown over time, so has public interest and policymakers' attention to their educational outcomes, fueling debate over the most effective methods of language instruction for ELLs. The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2001, the most recent comprehensive federal education policy, requires states to assess English language proficiency and holds them accountable for ensuring that ELLs both learn English and acquire the same academic knowledge as their English-speaking peers.² Following enactment of the NCLB Act, states have paid greater attention to ELLs as a group, yet data limitations often constrain educators and policymakers from determining how well these students are doing in school compared with their English-speaking peers.

One in nine of today's public school students face the task of learning English.

To answer this question — at least in part — we have focused on Texas, the state with the second-largest number of ELL students in the nation (about 832,000 ELL students in 2011, behind California's 1.1 million). To do so, we use a unique longitudinal data set obtained from the University of Texas at Dallas Education Research Center (UTD-ERC) that tracks ELL and non-ELL students in Texas from the first grade through high school graduation and into their postsecondary careers. We analyze the performance and trajectories of several groups of students. One group is composed of students who entered Texas public schools as first graders in 1995 and who advanced through school, reaching the 12th grade “on time” in 2006. We refer to this group throughout the report as the “on-time cohort” (or “cohort” for short). It includes students who have ever been classified as ELLs (“ever-ELLs”)³ and those who have never been (“non-ELLs”).

The ever-ELLs in the cohort represent a success story for at least two reasons. While many students drop out of school well before their would-be graduation date, these students reached the 12th grade with no interruption in their schooling. Further, they reached this point despite their initial language disadvantage. Our results reveal that ever-ELL students in the on-time cohort who completed and exited a language acquisition program after three years achieved the best results in terms of meeting Texas basic math and reading proficiency standards among all ELL groups. We also find that ELLs who have been in ELL programs for five or more years — or “long-term ELLs” — lagged behind significantly in every grade, raising important questions on how to address their literacy and linguistic needs.⁴

1 National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA), *The Growing Numbers of English Language Learner Students, 1998/99/2008/09*. (Washington, DC: NCELA, 2011), www.ncelea.gwu.edu/files/uploads/9/growingLEP_0809.pdf.

2 Jeanne Batalova, Michael Fix, and Julia Murray, *Measures of Change: The Demography and Literacy of Adolescent English Learners* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2007), www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/Measures_of_Change.pdf.

3 The ever-ELL group includes students who used to receive English Language Learner (ELL) instruction services but since then achieved proficiency in English as well as those who are still receiving ELL instruction.

4 Limited research is available on the long-term ELL population because data on ELL demographic and family background characteristics and academic outcomes are not typically disaggregated by the time in the program. One example of research on this population is the *Long-Term English Language Learner Project* conducted by a team at the Research Institute for the



Our analysis highlights substantial differences in test scores of ever-ELL students in the cohort by race and ethnicity; Asian students are the top-performing group, followed by white and then by Black and Hispanic students. Asian and white on-time cohort students who were ever classified as ELLs were almost as likely to graduate from high school as their non-ELL counterparts, while Black ever-ELLs were *more* likely to graduate.

Poverty and access to college-ready academic opportunities are among the most influential factors determining one's chances to attend college.

Among our other findings:

- Students' graduation from high school may be more highly correlated with race and ethnicity than ELL status.
- Ever-ELLs in the on-time cohort, regardless of racial or ethnic category, were much more likely to be economically disadvantaged than their non-ELL counterparts, with 90 percent of Hispanic ever-ELLs eligible for free and reduced-price lunches compared to 65 percent of Hispanic non-ELLs.
- The percentage of ever-ELL high school graduates in the on-time cohort who entered the workforce instead of going to college was higher among Hispanics than other groups, with 16 percent of Hispanic ever-ELLs heading to work compared to 9 percent of Black and 4 percent of Asian ever-ELLs.
- The outcomes of ever-ELLs in the on-time cohort are far superior to those of "all students" ever classified as ELL. This latter group includes those who entered the Texas system after the first grade, those who may have been held back, and those who may have dropped out.
- While the majority of the on-time cohort students (between 60 to 95 percent depending on students' ELL status, race or ethnicity, and subject test scores) achieved the basic proficiency level ("met the standard") on both math and reading tests, much lower shares (between 13 to 25 percent) of students reached the "commended performance" level despite the fact that the Texas Education Agency recognizes this standard as "goal for the majority of our students."⁵

In terms of Texas students' postsecondary trajectories, we find that Hispanic students whose parents opted to remove them from ELL classes were significantly less likely to go to college than their white counterparts, holding other factors constant. We also note the large gap in college enrollment between whites and Hispanics persisted among ever-ELLs even when student demographics and school context are taken into account, with Hispanic ever-ELLs substantially less likely to enroll. Surprisingly, we also find that exposure to work in high school may improve ELLs' performance. Those who also held a job while in school were more likely to go to college after graduation.

Finally, consistent with previous research, we find that poverty and access to college-ready academic opportunities are among the most influential factors determining one's chances to attend college. Regardless of their ELL status, students from poor families were substantially less likely to go to college right after graduation from high school. In contrast, dual-credit programs that let students gain both secondary- and postsecondary-level credits at the same time boosted students' chances of enrolling in college.

Study of Language in Urban Society at the City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center. Read more about the project at: <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/Linguistics/rislus/projects/LTELL/index.html>.

5 Texas Education Agency, "TAKS Performance Level Descriptors," www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3222&menu_id=793.



I. Introduction: English Language Learners in Texas — A Case Study for the Nation

Incorporating English language learners (ELLs) into the US school system has had a long and tumultuous educational and legal history.⁶ This history includes decisions about the availability and adequacy of special language acquisition programs for ELLs made through a variety of legal and political mechanisms, including referenda in Arizona, Massachusetts, and California, and the US Supreme Court's decision in *Horne v. Flores* in 2009.⁷ Most recently, a ruling by the US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit reversed a Texas court decision that would have ordered the state to implement a major restructuring of existing ELL programs.⁸ A particular concern noted by the appeals court was that although test-score differences between ELL and non-ELL students were alarming, a lack of longitudinal data on students who had participated in language programs may have led to the underreporting of their success rates. The data presented in this report offer insights into these questions.

In 2011, Texas had about 832,000 ELL students, second only to California, which had 1.1 million ELLs.⁹ Seventeen percent of all students in the state's PK-12 system were ELLs: more than twice their share in 1979 and 70 percent higher than the national share of ELL students in the K-12 student population (11 percent). Another striking fact about the ELL population in Texas is that 85 percent of ELLs in grades K-5 and 59 percent of ELLs in grades 6-12 were born in the United States.¹⁰ Over the years Texas has been collecting longitudinal student-level data on the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, test-score performance, high school graduation rates, state labor force participation, and college enrollment of its students. The availability of these data, along with the large size of its ELL population, makes Texas an ideal setting for investigating the educational outcomes of ELL students.

Outline of the Report

The report begins with a description of the data used and our focus population. We then present a descriptive profile of our principal study group: the cohort of students who were ever classified as ELLs (ever-ELLs), who entered Texas schools in the first grade, and who advanced to the 12th grade "on time." The next two sections of the report explore students' academic outcomes and postgraduation pathways, including the factors that predict their college enrollment. We conclude with a discussion of our findings' policy implications.

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- 6 Kenji Hakuta and Elizabeth Feldman Mostafapour, "Perspectives from the History and Politics of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education in the United States," in *Cultural and Language Diversity: Reflections on the Deaf Experience*, ed. Ila Parasnis (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996: 38–50); Luis Moll and Richard Ruiz, "The Schooling of Latino Students," in *Latinos: Remaking America*, eds. Marcelo Suárez-Orozco and Mariela Páez (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002: 362–74); Guadalupe San Miguel, *Contested Policy: The Rise and Fall of Federal Bilingual Education* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2004).
 - 7 *Horne v. Flores*, 557 U.S. (2009). In its decision, the US Supreme Court held that the lower courts had erred in their analysis in holding Arizona in civil contempt for failing to adequately fund ELL programs. The state had argued that changes in education law (including increased state funding), management changes in the school district involved, and passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) had so altered the foundations of prior court rulings that relief from such judgments was warranted.
 - 8 Jeremy Roebuck, "Court-Ordered ESL Overhaul Scrapped on Appeal," *The Monitor*, March 23, 2010, www.themonitor.com/articles/court-36731-overhaul-appeals.html.
 - 9 Texas Education Agency, "Texas English Language Learner Portal," *Bilingual/ESL Programs in Texas*, www.elltx.org/bilingual_esl.html; California Department of Education, "Data Quest, Statewide English Language Learners by Language and Grade, SY 2010-2011," <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest>.
 - 10 Authors' calculations of the US Census Bureau's 2010 American Community Survey (ACS). For comparison, 82 percent of ELLs nationwide in grades K-5 and 55 percent of ELLs in grades 6-12 were US born.



II. Data and Study Populations

A. Data

The dataset used for this analysis was obtained from the University of Texas at Dallas Education Research Center (UTD-ERC). The data collected from 1990 through 2009 include administrative records from the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the two state education agencies that oversee public K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions, respectively. Links across data files can be made through encrypted social security numbers, which enable researchers to construct longitudinal data files. The K-12 data include detailed indicators, such as race, ethnicity, age, gender, ELL status, initial English language program type (bilingual or English as a Second Language [ESL]), and poverty status (i.e., whether the student is eligible for the federal free and reduced-price meals program). The higher education data include students' demographics and enrollment in two-year and four-year colleges, among other variables.¹¹

The UTD-ERC dataset is particularly well suited to capture the diversity of Texas students. It includes the most current data, both longitudinal and snapshot (i.e., from any given moment), on student outcomes by grade. The longitudinal data include records of every student in Texas's public K-12 and college systems, making it possible to track individual and group progress. In contrast, other longitudinal datasets such as the National Education Longitudinal Study, Education Longitudinal Study of 2002, and Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study, involve repeated waves of interviews that require students

Table 1. Definitions of Key Study Groups

Term	Definition
On-Time Cohort	Entered the first grade in 1995 and reached 12 th grade on time in 2006. These students proceeded through the educational pipeline on time in each grade, i.e., they did not fail any grade.
Ever-ELLs	Members of the on-time cohort who were identified as ELLs and participated in an ELL program at some point during schooling.
Non-ELLs	Members of the on-time cohort who were never identified as ELLs.
All Students	Students identified, each year, as being in the same grade level as the on-time cohort. These students could have transferred from another state, have failed the previous grade, or entered the Texas public school system for the first time in later grades.
Ever-ELLs	Any students who were ever identified as ELLs and who participated in an ELL program.
Non-ELLs	Students who were never identified as ELLs.
Ever-ELLs Waived Out of Program	Students who were identified as ELLs by state assessments but whose parents waived them out of a language program.

¹¹ The data and analyses represent some of the most detailed comprehensive descriptive results available on a state public education system in the United States; however, the results do not imply a causal relationship between students' characteristics and outcomes.



to agree to participate in a survey multiple times. As a result, such studies suffer from significant sample attrition over time. Finally, other datasets that include ELLs (e.g., the National Assessment of Education Progress, NAEP) may not have samples large enough to accurately assess the progress of ELLs by various characteristics.

The UTD-ERC dataset is particularly well suited to capture the diversity of Texas students.

B. Study Populations

Our analysis focuses on two populations in Texas public schools (see Table 1). One group includes students who entered as first graders in 1995 and reached the 12th grade “on time” in 2006. We call this group the “on-time cohort” because they remained in school until the 12th grade and progressed on schedule. A second group — “all students” — includes any student captured in a certain grade at one point in time. These may have been new entrants to the school system after 1995 or students who failed to progress to the next grade at some point in time.

C. Study Outcomes

We focus on two sets of student outcomes:

- (1) Performance on elementary and secondary tests, including passing rates on the state standardized math and reading tests in the third through 11th grades. The “met the standard” and “commended performance” levels are equivalent to the “proficient” and “advanced” levels established by the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act*.¹²
- (2) Early postsecondary outcomes, including transition to the state’s workforce and college enrollment. This analysis provides one of the first examinations of the college-enrollment and labor force participation outcomes of ELL students using longitudinal state data.

It is important to note that the state’s academic achievement test changed in 2003 from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) to the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).¹³ The newly initiated TAKS seeks to improve on the TAAS by measuring knowledge rather than skills, by extending testing from grades 3-11 (the TAAS tested until only the tenth grade), and by including a science exam in high school versus only in middle school.¹⁴ In our report, TAAS scores are reported for third and fifth grades, and TAKS scores are recorded from eighth grade through 11th grade.¹⁵

12 The NCLB Act stipulates that states have to develop challenging academic content standards and set up two achievement levels — “proficient” and “advanced” — to determine how well students learn the academic material. The Act did not provide further guidelines on what these proficiency levels might mean, leaving the definitions and cutoff points to the states. US Department of Education, *No Child Left Behind Act*, Part A, Sec. 1111 (b)(1)(D), www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf.

13 The “meeting minimum” and “academically recognized” standards were the proficiency levels on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), whereas “met the standard” and “commended performance” are the levels on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).

14 Teddy Tutson, “Students Now Taking TAKS instead of TAAS Tests: New Exam Predicted to Narrow Performance Gap,” *Houston Chronicle*, June 26, 2002, www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Students-now-taking-TAKS-instead-of-TAAS-tests-2096145.php.

15 In the 2011-12 academic year, Texas will again replace its accountability exam, the TAKS, with a new exam, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), based on legislation passed in 2007 and 2009. This new test is deemed to be significantly more rigorous than previous state exams; it measures a “child’s performance as well as academic growth.” See Texas Education Agency, “STAAR to Replace TAKS,” (Texas Education Agency News Releases Online, January 2010), www.tea.state.tx.us/index4.aspx?id=7874.



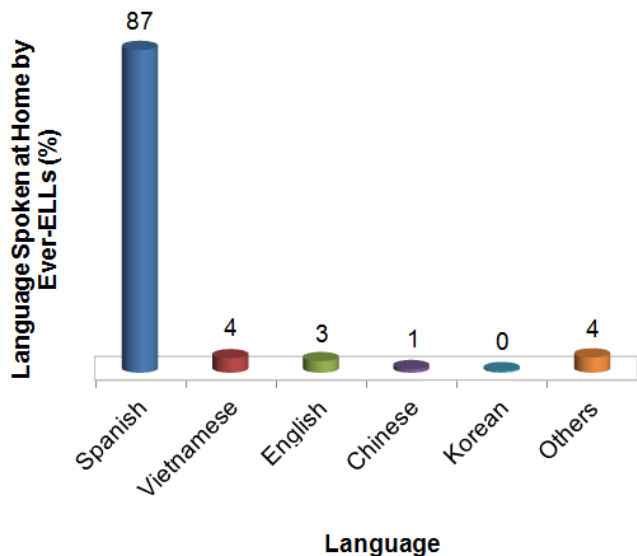
III. Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics

Of the 133,698 on-time cohort students in 2007, roughly 18 percent (or 24,566) were identified as ELLs at some point during their K-12 education. During their educational journey, some of these students exited language instruction programs and were reclassified as “fluent English proficient,” while others remained ELLs up to the 12th grade. What these students share is that at some point during their schooling they were designated as ELLs and received English language support.

A. Home Languages

Of the ever-ELLs in the cohort most (87 percent) spoke Spanish at home (see Figure 1). The second-most common home language was Vietnamese at 4 percent; other Asian languages, such as Chinese, Korean, Laotian (Lao), and Cambodian (Khmer) were also spoken by ELL students, although each represented 1 percent or less of the total.

Figure 1. Top Five Languages Spoken at Home by Ever-ELLs, 1995



Source: Analysis by Stella M. Flores of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

B. Enrollment in English Language Programs

Depending on their state of residence, ELL students are eligible for English language instruction. This instruction comes in a variety of forms that generally fall under either bilingual education or ESL programs.¹⁶ In Texas,¹⁷ bilingual programs (in which content subjects are taught in the student’s

16 For a brief overview of English language instruction educational programs used by states under the NCLB’s Title III, refer to the US Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, *Biennial Evaluation Report to Congress on the Implementation of the State Formula Grant Program, 2002-2004* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, 2005), www.nclb.gov/files/uploads/3/Biennial_Report_0204.pdf.

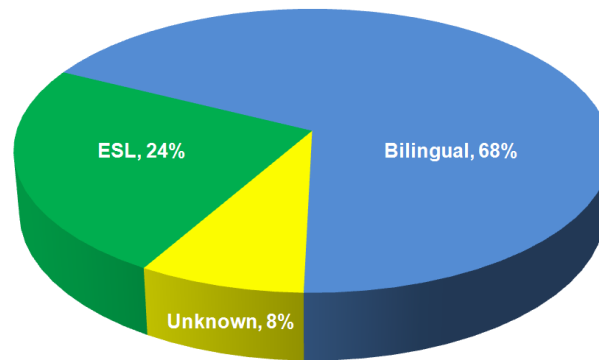
17 According to the Texas Education Code, public school districts with at least 20 ELL students who are speakers of the same language are required to provide bilingual education “in kindergarten through the elementary grades; bilingual education, instruction in English as a second language (ESL), or other transitional language instruction approved by the agency in post-elementary grades through the eighth grade; and instruction in English as a second language in grades nine through twelve.” An exception is made for school districts with fewer than 20 students per grade level who are classified as ELLs, in which case the districts can instead provide ESL instruction at the elementary level. See Texas Education Code, Sec. 29.053, *Establishment of Bilingual Education and Special Language Programs*, www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/Docs/ED/htm/ED.29.htm#B.



native language, usually by a native speaker of that language), include *transitional* and *dual immersion* programs; ESL programs (which generally include some support to students in their native language while instruction is conducted in English) include *content-based* and *pull-out* programs.¹⁸

Figure 2 indicates that 68 percent of the cohort students identified as ELLs in 1995 had been enrolled in bilingual education, while 24 percent had received ESL instruction. (About 8 percent of students did not report whether they were in either bilingual or ESL programs).

Figure 2. Type of Initial Program Enrollment of Ever-ELL Members in On-Time Cohort, 1995



Source: Flores's analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

Table 2 shows how much time ever-ELL members of the on-time cohort spent in various language programs, disaggregating students by racial or ethnic group as well as by their participation in special education services (SPEDs).¹⁹ The data reveal that a significant percentage of on-time cohort students — from all racial and ethnic groups — who were ever identified as ELL were also identified as SPED students: 9 percent among Asians, 19 percent among Blacks, 16 percent among Hispanics, and 22 percent among whites. Of note is the fact that Asian ever-ELLs were much more likely to be served by ESL than bilingual programs compared with other groups, whereas Hispanic ever-ELLs were more likely to receive bilingual instruction. This disparity likely reflects the fact that, in many districts, the concentration of students speaking the same Asian language was not large enough to receive bilingual instruction in that language.

Table 2. Average Number of Years in Program Spent by Ever-ELL Members of On-Time Cohort, by SPED Status, Race, and Ethnicity, 2007

	Asian		Black		Hispanic		White	
	Total Ever-ELL	Non-SPED Ever-ELL	Total Ever-ELL	Non-SPED Ever-ELL	Total Ever-ELL	Non-SPED Ever-ELL	Total Ever-ELL	Non-SPED Ever-ELL
All students	1,926	1,760	266	216	21,542	18,051	803	624
Years in ELL Program (Bilingual or ESL)	3.3	3.1	3.5	3.2	4.8	4.3	3.4	3.0
Years in Bilingual Program	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.3	2.6	2.6	0.3	0.3
Years in ESL Program	2.6	2.5	1.1	1.1	1.5	1.1	0.9	0.8
Years in SPED Program	0.5	-	1.2	-	1.2	-	1.4	-

Source: Flores's analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

¹⁸ Texas Education Agency, "Texas English Language Learners Portal."

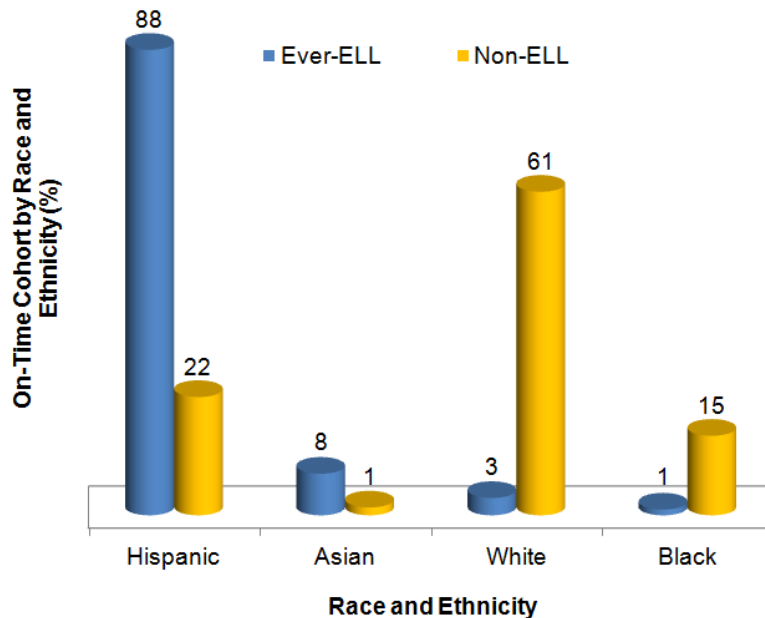
¹⁹ Students in special education programs may have a diverse range of conditions such as learning disabilities, speech, language, visual or hearing impairments, and/or emotional disturbances that affect their ability to acquire academic knowledge, progress through school on time, and graduate from high school. As required by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), schools have to develop an individualized education program (IEP) for each student with disabilities that includes information on the student's current performance, annual learning goals, ways to assess educational progress, and the types of services to be provided. Depending on students' educational needs and conditions, they may be placed in the regular classroom with certain accommodations and supplementary aids, join mainstream students for certain classes, attend special classes for students with disabilities, or be placed in a special school or hospital.



C. Race and Ethnicity

Most ever-ELLs in the on-time cohort were Hispanic (88 percent of the 24,566 students), while most non-ELLs were white (61 percent of the 109,132 students) (see Figure 3 and Table 3). Only 1 percent of ever-ELLs were identified as Black or African American, compared to 15 percent of the non-ELL students in the on-time cohort.

Figure 3. On-Time Cohort Members, by Race and Ethnicity (%), 2007



Note: The number of on-time cohort members who identified as Native American was less than 0.5 percent, and their share is not displayed in the figure above.

Source: Flores's analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

D. Poverty by Race and Ethnicity

As Figure 4 shows, ever-ELL members of the on-time cohort in each racial and ethnic category were much more likely to be economically disadvantaged (i.e., eligible for free and reduced-price lunches) than their non-ELL counterparts.

The group with the largest number of ever-ELL students — Hispanics — had the highest proportion of economically disadvantaged students: Ninety percent of Hispanic students identified as ever-ELL were eligible for free and reduced-price lunches versus 65 percent of non-ELL Hispanics. Ever-ELL Asian (45 percent) and white (37 percent) students were more than twice as likely to be economically disadvantaged as their non-ELL counterparts, but they were substantially less likely to be poor than their Black (73 percent) and Hispanic (90 percent) ever-ELL counterparts.

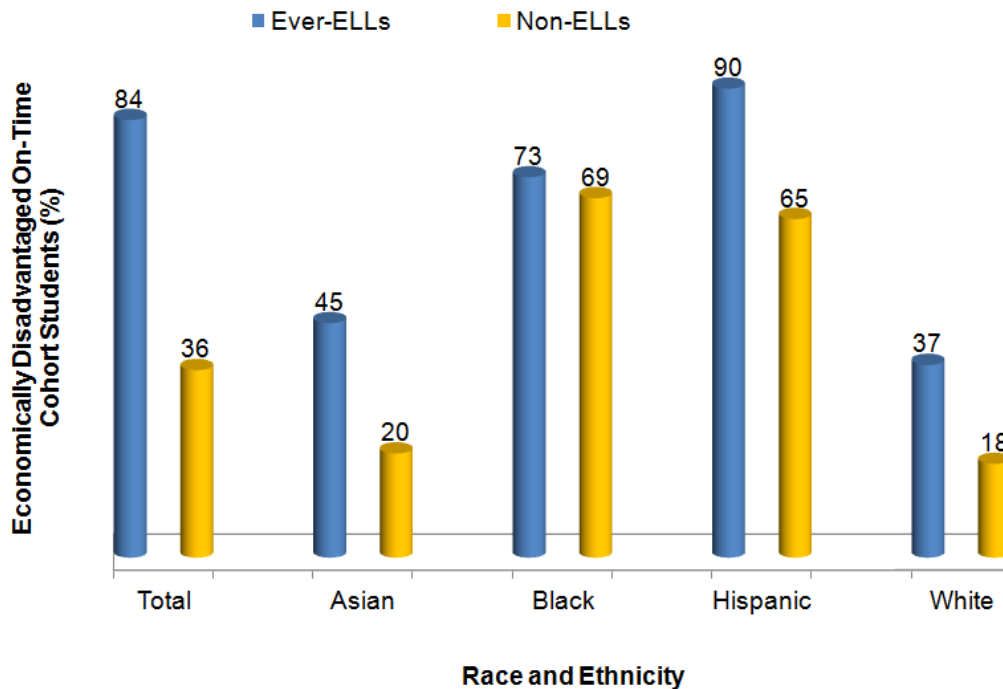


Table 3. On-Time Cohort Members, by Race, Ethnicity, and ELL Status, 2007

	All		Ever-ELL		Non-ELL		Ever-ELL Share (%)
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
Total	133,698	100.0	24,566	100.0	109,132	100.0	18.4
Asian	3,537	2.7	1,926	7.8	1,611	1.5	54.5
Black	16,630	12.4	266	1.1	16,364	15.0	1.6
Hispanic	45,863	34.3	21,542	87.7	24,321	22.3	47.0
Native American	338	0.3	29	0.1	309	0.3	8.6
White	67,330	50.4	803	3.3	66,527	61.0	1.2

Source: Flores's analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

Figure 4. Percentage of On-Time Cohort Students Identified as Economically Disadvantaged, by ELL Status, Race, and Ethnicity, 2007



Source: Flores's analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.



IV. Performance on Standardized State Math and Reading Tests

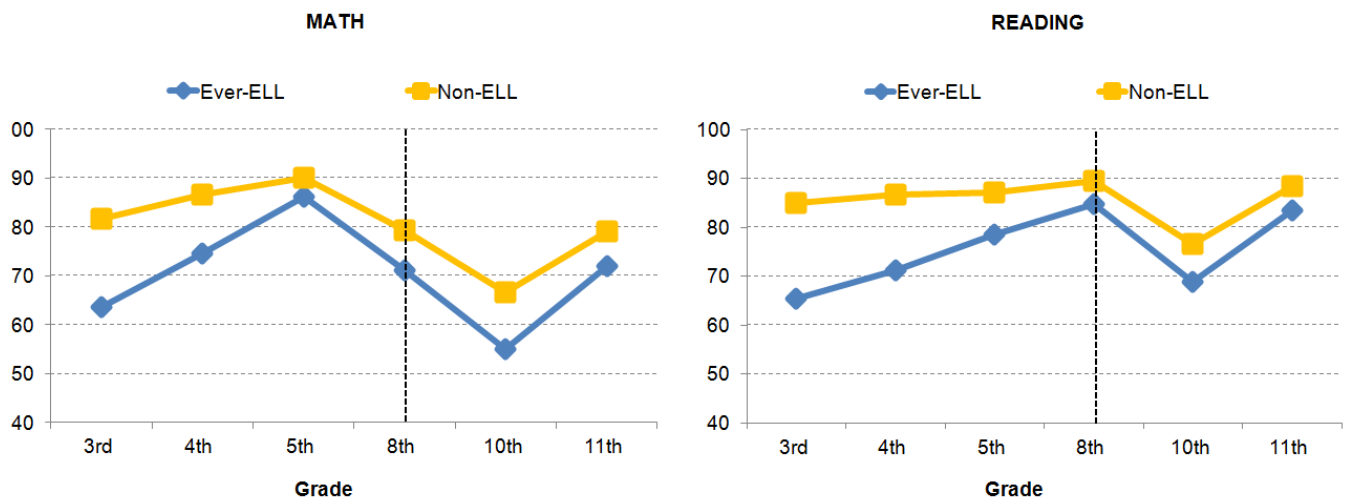
A. Test-Score Outcomes by Ever-ELL Status

Figure 5 shows the percentage of students in the on-time cohort who “met the standard”²⁰ on the state math and reading exams in grades 3, 5, 8, 10, and 11.

One prominent result displayed here and in other figures is the drop in the percentages of students who met proficiency standards between the fifth and eighth grades. This decline coincided with the year the state switched from TAAS to the new accountability exam, the TAKS. Thus, cohort members took the TAKS from the eighth grade on. This kind of drop is often seen following changes in tests.²¹

Figure 5 presents particularly notable ELL test-score gaps in the third grade. The data show a difference of 18 percentage points in math and 20 percentage points in reading between ever-ELLs and non-ELLs. Ever-ELL members of the on-time cohort seemed to hit their peak performance and nearly achieve “gap closure” in math in the fifth grade and in reading in the eighth grade. In both math and reading a nearly 20-point gap in the third grade was reduced to a 7- and 4-point gap, respectively, by the 11th grade. Nonetheless, it appears that, on average, ever-ELLs lagged non-ELLs during their entire school career.

Figure 5. Percentage of On-Time Cohort Members Who “Met the Standard” in Math and Reading, by ELL Status,²² 1995-2007



Note: The depicted scores are from the TAAS exam in third through fifth grades and from the TAKS exam beginning in eighth grade. The vertical dotted line represents this change in the Texas test regime in 2003, or in the eighth grade for this particular cohort.

Source: Flores’s analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

20 According to the Texas Education Agency, the “met the standard” level should “exemplify what Texas wants all students to minimally achieve at each grade level for each foundation subject area.” “Commended performance” should serve as the goal for the majority of students. Acquiring this level of knowledge and skills is viewed as the foundation for students’ success in the future. See Texas Education Agency, “TAKS Performance Level Descriptors,” www.tea.state.tx.us/index3.aspx?id=3222&menu_id=793.

21 Daniel Koretz and Laura Hamilton, “Testing for Accountability in K-12,” in *Educational Measurement*, ed. Robert Brennan (Westport, CT: American Council on Education/Praeger, 2006: 531–78); Robert Linn, “Issues in the Design of Accountability Systems CSE Technical Report 650” (paper presented at the 2005 National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, Los Angeles, CA, April 2005), www.cse.ucla.edu/products/reports/r650.pdf.

22 Appendix A provides detailed results, displayed in Figures 5-11.



B. Test-Score Outcomes by Race, Ethnicity, and Ever-ELL Status

I. Math Results

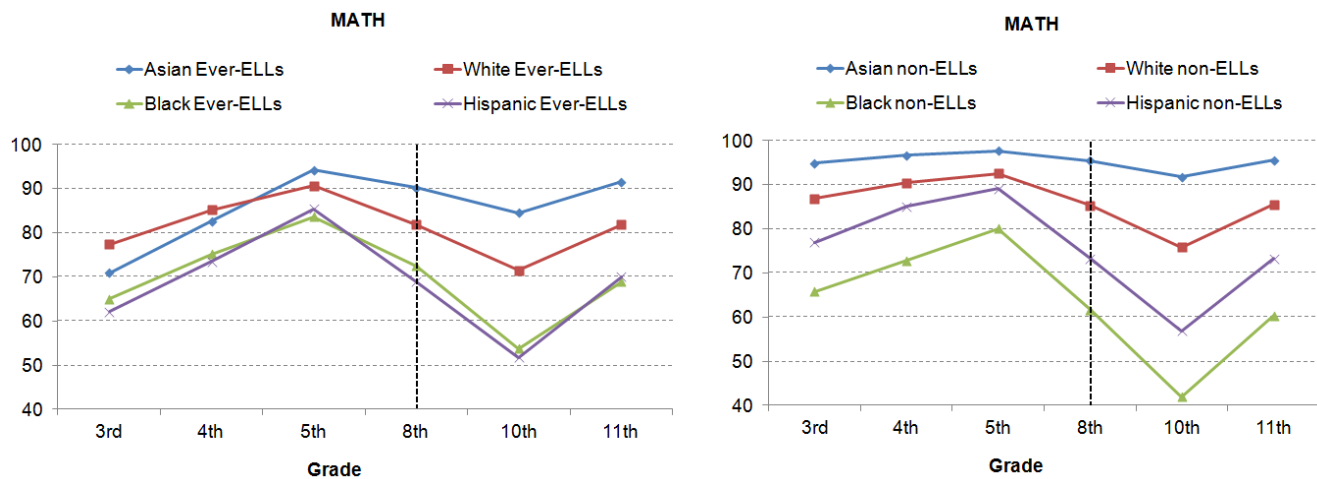
As Figure 6 (left panel) shows, there were wide racial gaps in performance on math tests among ever-ELLs.

While white ever-ELL students in the cohort were initially the highest-scoring group of ever-ELLs, they were surpassed by Asians in the fifth grade; Asian ever-ELLs retained and increased this advantage over time. In fact, 92 percent of the Asian ever-ELL students “met the standard” in math in the 11th grade. At this grade level, Asian ever-ELLs outperformed even their non-ELLs peers who were white, Black, or Hispanic. Figure 6 also shows that racial disparities in performance were wider among non-ELL students in the cohort than among ever-ELLs.

When comparing the two panels in Figure 6, it is also worth noting the initial achievement gap within racial groups in the third grade. Black ever-ELL students in the cohort scored only 1 percentage point lower (65 percent versus 66 percent) than their non-ELL counterparts in math. However, they outperformed their non-ELL counterparts from the fourth grade on. Asian students show the greatest within-race ELL gap, with a 24-point difference between the percentage of ever-ELL students who passed third-grade math and their non-ELL counterparts (71 percent versus 95 percent). However, by later grades, ever-ELL Asian and white students had nearly closed the gap with their non-ELL counterparts.

The share of ever-ELL Hispanics who met proficiency standards was smaller than for Asian or white ever-ELLs in every grade, but similar to those of Black ever-ELLs. The gap between ever-ELL and non-ELL Hispanics narrowed substantially, from 15 percentage points in the third grade to only 3 percentage points in the 11th grade.

Figure 6. Percentage of Students Who “Met the Standard” in Math, by Race, Ethnicity, and ELL Status, 1995-2007



Note: The depicted scores are from the TAAS exam in third through fifth grades and from the TAKS exam beginning in eighth grade. The vertical dotted line represents this change in the Texas test regime in 2003, or in the eighth grade for this particular cohort.

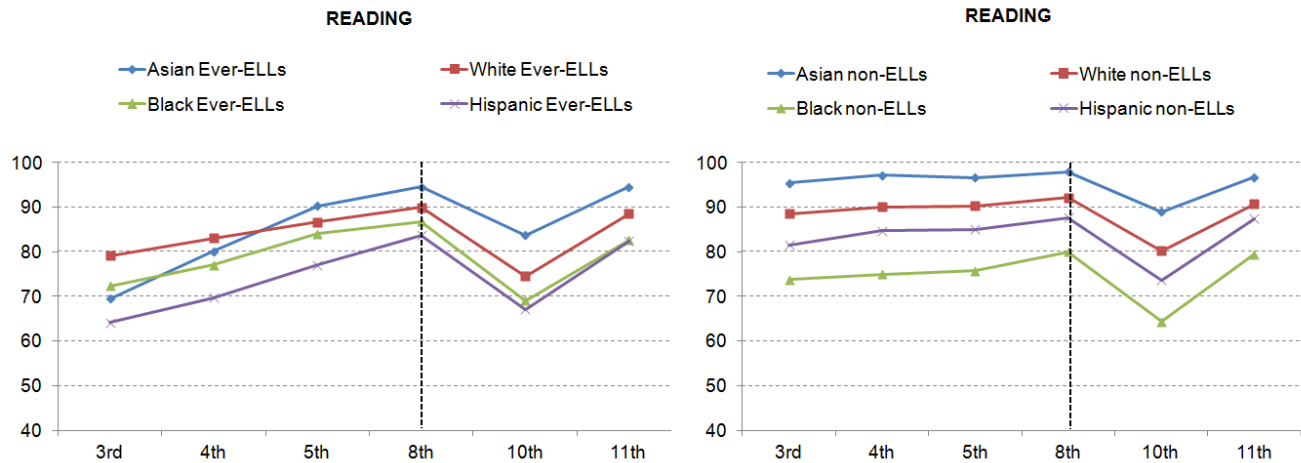
Source: Flores’s analysis of the UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.



2. Reading Results

The right panels of both Figures 6 and 7 indicate that Asian non-ELLs performed best in both math and reading, followed by white, Hispanic, and Black students. This finding is consistent with other literature on academic performance by race, ethnicity, and immigrant origin.²³ However, there are a few surprising outcomes captured in Figures 6 and 7. First, there is less variance in reading than in math. Second, the difference between the scores of Black non-ELL students and those of their ever-ELL counterparts was only 2 percentage points for the third-grade exam (74 percent versus 72 percent). However, by the 11th-grade exit exam in reading, the percentage of Black ever-ELL students who “met the standard” was actually higher than their non-ELL counterparts (83 percent versus 79 percent), mirroring the pattern observed in math outcomes. In sum, Black ever-ELLs, who are likely to come from immigrant families, outperform native English-speaking Blacks by the end of high school.

Figure 7. Percentage of On-Time Cohort Members Who “Met the Standard” in Reading, by Race, Ethnicity, ELL Status, 1995-2007



Note: The depicted scores are from the TAAS exam in third through fifth grades and from the TAKS exam beginning in eighth grade. The vertical dotted line represents this change in the Texas test regime in 2003, or in the eighth grade for this particular cohort.

Source: Flores’s analysis of the UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

C. Test-Score Outcomes by Time in Language Acquisition Programs: “Quick Exiters” and Long-Term ELL Students

This report also examines how the number of years enrolled in an English language instruction program predicts an ELL student’s academic achievement and trajectory, including high school graduation and college entry. According to the Texas Education Agency, a key goal for ELL instruction is that “most ELLs who have been in US schools since first grade will be able to meet the requirements of the TEKS in English or Spanish by grade 3.”²⁴ Using the three-year time frame for ELL program participation as a construct for

²³ Alejandro Portes and Lingxin Hao, “The Schooling of Children of Immigrants: Contextual Effects on the Educational Attainment of the Second Generation,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 101, no. 33 (2004): 11,920–927, www.pnas.org/content/101/33/11920.full.pdf.

²⁴ Texas Education Agency, *LPAC Decision-Making Process for the Texas Assessment Program: Procedural Manual for the 2010-2011 School Year* (Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency, 2009): 6, www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/ell/LPAC-Manual2011-pt1.pdf. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) test measures students against the state standards for what they should know and be able to do.



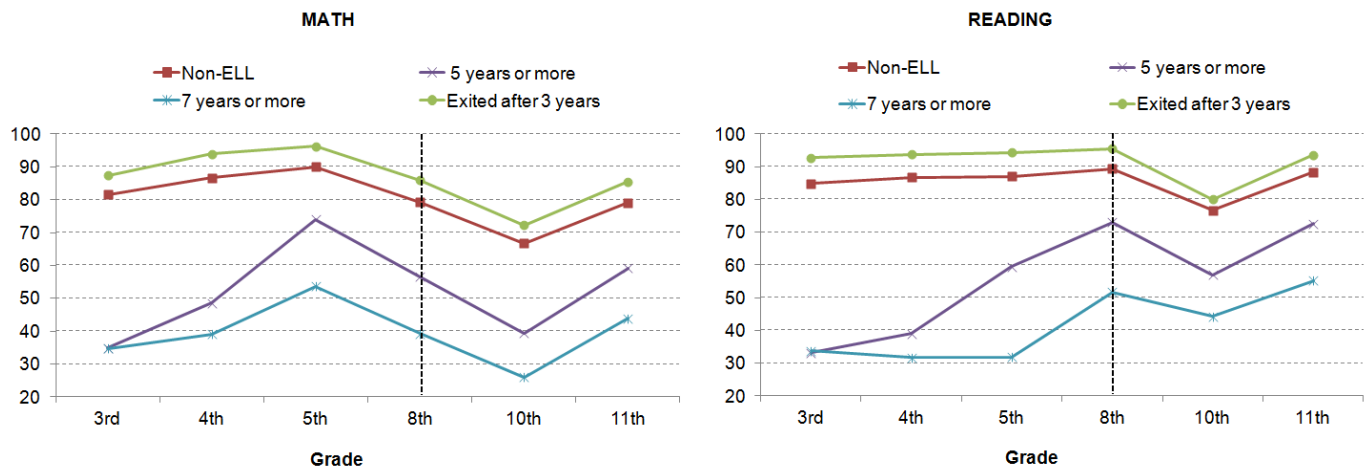
our cohort, starting in first grade, Figure 8 presents math and reading test-score outcomes of ever-ELL members of the on-time cohort, disaggregated by time in the program.

On the one hand, we find that students who exited an ELL instruction program within three years (“quick exiters”) have quite positive outcomes. Their math and reading “met the standard” more than their non-ELL counterparts in the same grade (see Figure 8). For instance, among 11th graders, 94 percent of “quick exiters” “met the standard” in reading, versus 88 percent of non-ELLs.

On the other hand, our results raise concerns about the students who remained in the programs for five or more years, or “long-term ELLs.” A significant share of students who participated in an ELL program for five or more years scored relatively low in math. Whereas 86 percent of students who exited an ELL program in three years “met the standard” in math in the 11th grade, only 59 percent of long-term ELLs “met the standard” (see Figure 8, left panel). Ever-ELLs who had been in the program for seven years or more were even less likely to meet standards (44 percent). The percentages of students who “met the standard” in reading followed similar patterns (right panel of Figure 8), with “quick exiters” doing substantially better than long-term ELLs.

Our data do not permit for a more refined analysis of long-term ELLs and their distinct literacy and language needs. Other research suggests, however, that while they are orally bilingual many have poor academic literacy skills in English and their native language, which in turn hinder their school performance. A team from the Research Institute for the Study of Language in Urban Society found that long-term ELLs consist of: (1) transnational students who move back and forth between the United States and another country and who have received some schooling in both countries,²⁵ and (2) students who move in and out of ELL instruction programs and mainstream classrooms without receiving language support in the latter.²⁶ Due to gaps in their schooling, these students do not gain the literacy skills they need to acquire content-area knowledge and, as a result, they often fail a grade or drop out.

Figure 8. Students in the On-Time Cohort by Years in ELL Program and Non-ELLs Who “Met the Standard” in Math and Reading, 1995-2007



Notes: Time in program means student exited ELL program after specific period of years. No captured reentry into program. The depicted scores are from the TAAS exam in third through fifth grades and from the TAKS exam beginning in eighth grade. The vertical dotted line represents this change in the Texas test regime in 2003, or in the eighth grade for this particular cohort.

Source: Flores’s analysis of the UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

25 Although unknown, the number of long-term ELLs who are transnational students is likely to be high in a border state such as Texas.

26 Kate Menken and Tatyana Kleyn, “The Difficult Road for Long-Term English Learners,” *Educational Leadership* 66, no. 7 (2009), www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/apr09/vol66/num07/The_Difficult_Road_for_Long-Term_English_Learners.aspx.



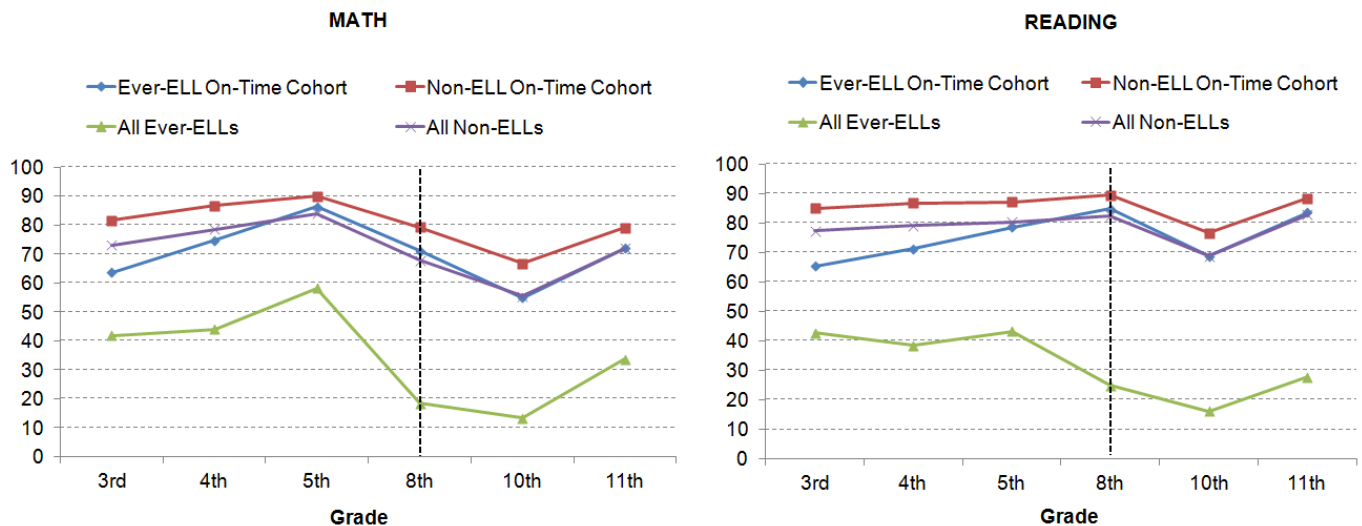
D. Test-Score Outcomes of the On-Time Cohort versus “All Students”

The longitudinal data collected on the members of the on-time cohort offer some distinct advantages. They can shed light on changes in standardized test scores over time of students who remained in the system and proceeded through grades on time. They also indicate how the amount of time students spent in English language acquisition programs may have affected their scores. The on-time cohort represents a success story since there was no interruption in their schooling and they remained on the path to graduation. By definition, these students would not include newly arriving immigrants or students who dropped out. Under the NCLB Act, states are required to ensure that all students succeed in acquiring rigorous academic knowledge and gaining proficiency in math and reading, including more vulnerable groups such as students who are learning English and/or whose education is interrupted.

In this section, we compare the results of two groups of ever-ELLs — those in the on-time cohort and among “all students” — to examine differences in their academic performance. While ever-ELLs among “all students” might have been new immigrants who enrolled in school in later grades, some were US-born students from another state who were identified as ELLs upon entering Texas public schools, while others were Texas ELL students who had repeated a grade.

The group of “all students” classified as ELLs had alarmingly low scores in math (see Figure 9). Only 42 percent of this group “met the standard” on the third-grade math exam, compared to 64 percent of the ever-ELLs in the on-time cohort and 82 percent of the non-ELLs in the on-time cohort.²⁷ The figures for the 11th-grade math exit exam were 34 percent (“all” ever-ELL students), 72 percent (ever-ELLs in the on-time cohort), and 79 percent (non-ELLs in the on-time cohort).²⁸ The low passing rates of the ever-ELLs among “all students” raise serious concerns about their chances of remaining in school, graduating, and pursuing postsecondary education.

Figure 9. Percentage of Members of “On-Time Cohort” and “All Students” Who “Met the Standard” in Math and Reading, by ELL Status, 1995-2007



Notes: The depicted scores are from the TAAS exam in third through fifth grades and from the TAKS exam beginning in eighth grade. The vertical dotted line represents this change in the Texas test regime in 2003. Members of the on-time cohort (or longitudinal cohort students) are those who entered first grade in 1995 and stayed through the 11th grade, proceeding through all grades “on time.” Cross-sectional students are “all students,” regardless of cohort status, including new entrants and those that may be retaking the exam, at the selected grade level.

Source: Flores’s analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

²⁷ Seventy-three percent of all non-ELLs in third grade met minimum standards in math.

²⁸ Seventy-two percent of all non-ELL 11th graders passed the math test.



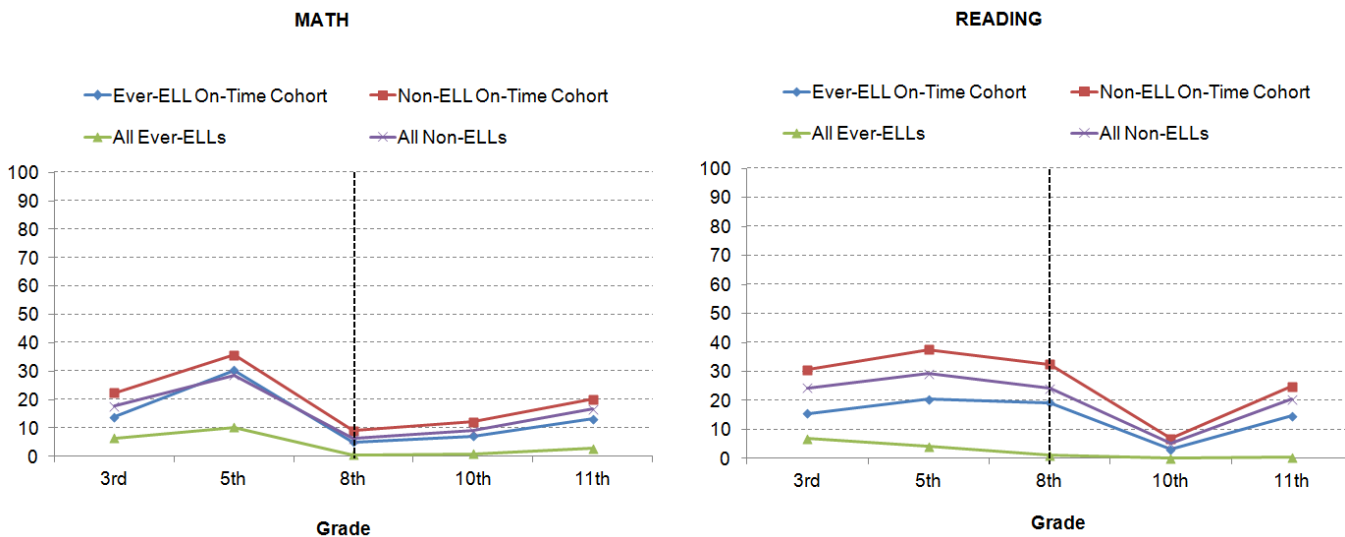
As an additional point of comparison, the gap in performance on the math exam between the ever-ELL members of the on-time cohort versus those among “all students” is 22 percentage points in third grade, 31 points in fourth grade, 28 points in fifth grade, 53 points in eighth grade, and 38 points in 11th grade. We find similar patterns in reading outcomes, but with even higher gaps between ever-ELLs in the on-time cohort versus those among “all students.”

E. Percentage of Students Who Achieved “Commended Performance” Levels in Math and Reading

The performance of some groups, especially ever-ELLs among “all students,” is poor in terms of the proficiency standards required by the NCLB Act. Meanwhile, far less than half of all students — regardless of their ELL status — met the substantially higher “commended performance” standards. As Figure 10 indicates, the percentage of students who met more rigorous academic standards in the Texas public schools does not exceed 38 percent, whether among “all students” or the on-time cohort.

The analysis reveals only a small gap in performance between ever-ELLs in the on-time cohort and “all” non-ELLs on the fifth and eighth-grade math exam. The percentage of ever-ELLs among “all students” who reached the “commended performance” level in math is the lowest of all groups examined, bottoming out in the eighth grade and remaining flat — at an extremely low level (3 percent) — through the 11th grade. The right panel of Figure 10 presents similarly worrying results for reading, pointing to the fact that even the “successful” (on-time) students who proceed through school with no major setbacks are not achieving high results.

Figure 10. Percentage of Members of On-Time Cohort and “All Students” Who Achieved “Commended Performance” Levels in Math and Reading, by ELL Status, 1995-2007



Notes: The depicted scores are from the TAAS exam in third through fifth grades and from the TAKS exam beginning in eighth grade. The vertical dotted line represents this change in the Texas test regime in 2003. Members of the on-time cohort (or longitudinal cohort students) are those who entered first grade in 1995 and stayed through the 11th grade, proceeding through all grades “on time.” Cross-sectional students are “all students,” regardless of cohort status, including new entrants and those that may be retaking the exam, at the selected grade level. “Commended performance” is equivalent to “above proficient” per NCLB Act requirements.

Source: Flores’s analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.



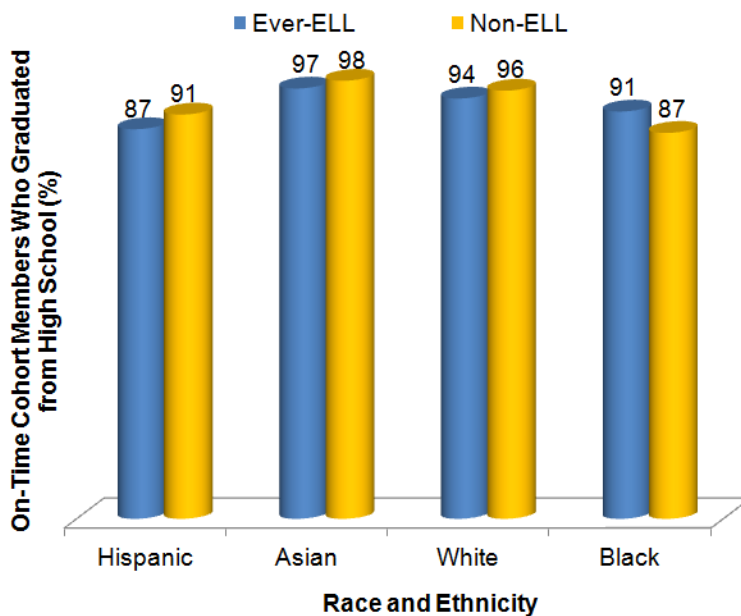
V. Graduation and the Post-High-School Trajectories of ELL Students

A. Graduating from High School

High school graduation is an important milestone in students' educational careers. It is also an essential benchmark of schools' success in providing students with the knowledge and skills needed in their future. Stubbornly low graduation rates, especially among youth from poor and minority families, are at the center of national and state debates and proposed education reforms. Here we are able to compare 12th graders in the on-time cohort who graduated on time in the spring of 2007 by race, ethnicity, and ELL status.

Figure 11 indicates that students' graduation from high school may be more highly correlated with race and ethnicity than ELL status. Regardless of their ELL status, nearly all Asians in the on-time cohort left school with a diploma. A similarly high percentage of white students — 96 percent of non-ELLs and 94 percent of ever-ELLs — graduated from high school. Hispanic ever-ELLs were only slightly less likely to graduate from high school (87 percent) than their non-ELL counterparts (91 percent). On the other hand, Black ever-ELLs were somewhat *more* likely to graduate from high school than their non-ELL counterparts (91 and 87 percent, respectively).

Figure 11. Percentage of On-Time Cohort Members Who Graduated from High School, by Race, Ethnicity, and ELL Status, 2007



Source: Flores's analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

B. Post-High-School Outcomes

We also examined how ever-ELLs in the on-time cohort fared after they graduated from high school. The Texas longitudinal data allow us to explore this previously unaddressed question by reporting whether students in the fall of 2007: (1) attended a two-year public college, (2) attended a public or private four-year college, (3) graduated from high school and worked full-time in Texas, (4) graduated from high



school with no record of working (those graduating could be unemployed or not looking for work, among other options), or (5) failed to earn a high school degree and were not working. In some cases there was no record of graduation from high school, no employment record, and no record at all found in any Texas postsecondary files.

Two major trends in our data on the on-time cohort broadly replicate the results found in other analyses.²⁹ First, Asian students overwhelmingly attended four-year public institutions, whereas more Hispanic students attended two-year public institutions (see Table 4). The Texas data show that about 46 percent of ever-ELL and 48 percent of non-ELL Asian cohort members enrolled in college after graduation from high school (in the fall of 2007). Among Hispanic cohort members, those in the ever-ELL and non-ELL groups enrolled in two-year colleges in equal proportions. Non-ELL Hispanics had higher rates of enrollment in four-year public and private institutions, but these rates were still lower than all other racial/ethnic groups.

Second, the percentage of ever-ELL students in the on-time cohort who graduated from high school and entered the workforce instead of going to college was higher among Hispanics than other groups (e.g., 16 percent for ever-ELL Hispanics versus 4 percent for Asian ever-ELLs and 9 percent for Black ever-ELLs). About 29 percent of ever-ELL Hispanics and 23 percent of non-ELL Hispanics graduated but did not enroll in postsecondary education or enter the workforce. Some of these Hispanic students might have been disconnected from the workforce or their education by their immigration status. Using a different set of public data on Texas, Flores³⁰ finds that high school graduates who are unauthorized are more likely to enroll in college in Texas than other states because of a state policy that allows eligible unauthorized students to attend college at in-state tuition rates. However, they often do so at the older age range of 21 to 24. In addition, the failure of this group of unauthorized high school graduates to appear in the Texas wage files does not necessarily indicate that they were not working in Texas; there were perhaps engaged in work not officially recorded by the Texas Workforce Commission.

Table 4. Postsecondary Outcomes of Students Who Reached 12th Grade “On Time” in Texas Public Schools, by Race, Ethnicity, and ELL Status, 2007

	Asian		Black		Hispanic		White	
	Ever-ELL	Non-ELL	Ever-ELL	Non-ELL	Ever-ELL	Non-ELL	Ever-ELL	Non-ELL
Total number	1,919	1,606	265	16,028	21,360	24,158	798	66,298
Outcome (%)								
Enroll 2-Year Public	25	19	25	20	27	27	33	28
Enroll 4-Year Public	46	48	26	22	15	20	25	27
Enroll 4-Year Private	5	9	2	4	2	3	5	6
High School Graduation, Work in Texas (wage data)	4	3	9	13	16	17	12	12
High School Graduation, No Work	16	21	29	28	29	23	20	22
No Graduation, Work in Texas	1	0	3	4	4	3	3	1
No Graduation, No Work in Texas, or not in Texas at all	2	1	6	8	8	5	3	2

Source: Flores's analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

29 Alison Hagey and Farley Staniec, “Immigrant Status, Race, and Institutional Choice in Higher Education,” *Economics of Education Review* 21, no. 4 (2002): 381–92.

30 Stella Flores, “The First State Dream Act: Immigration and In-State Resident Tuition in Texas,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 32, no. 4 (2010): 435–55.



In contrast, given their high academic achievement rates, the large percentage of Asian students who graduated from high school but did not show up in the Texas postsecondary education or wage data files suggests that many of these students left the state to attend college or for employment. This pattern, though, cannot be fully confirmed without merging cross-state data files.

C. Predicting College Entry for Ever-ELL Students: What Factors Matter the Most?

We turn next to our analysis of the factors influencing the college enrollment of the on-time cohort, by ELL status, accounting for student demographics and high school characteristics. Prior research has found that additional academic preparation, such as AP classes, benefits students in many ways. It boosts college admissions, opens access to scholarships, and lowers college costs (as students take less time for degree completion).³¹ Studies have also shown that students who are poor or attend low-quality high schools are less likely to go to college.³²

Employing a logistic regression analysis, we examined the college enrollment outcomes of students who were ever identified as eligible for and who participated in an ELL program, students who were never identified as ELLs, as well as students who were identified as ELLs but whose parents obtained a waiver from their participation in the language program (see Appendix B for the regression coefficients).

The results indicate that Hispanic ever-ELLs in the cohort were substantially less likely to go to college than whites, when accounting for individual, high school context, academic preparation, and differences in other student and school characteristics. Of particular interest is the large white-Hispanic gap in college enrollment among students whose parents obtained a waiver from participating in any ELL instruction (in contrast, the gap between whites and Asians and Blacks is not statistically significant). This finding suggests that Hispanic ELLs who opt out of language acquisition programs may be particularly disadvantaged in terms of their college enrollment.³³

Asian and Black ever-ELLs in the cohort appeared to be as likely as whites to enroll in college immediately following graduation, once additional factors are accounted for. Black and Asian non-ELLs were more likely to enroll in college than whites. Our earlier results showed that Black students, particularly non-ELLs, had lower academic outcomes and graduation rates than other groups. However, once we control for student and school differences, especially poverty, the outcomes for Black non-ELLs are in fact better than their white counterparts.

We also find that male students are, in general, less likely to enroll in college right after graduation than women. These results suggest the need for a closer examination of male student outcomes and the complex relationship between gender and curriculum interventions and language ability.

We also explored the impacts of participation in college-ready courses such as AP/IB and trigonometry, and participation in dual-credit programs. We find that these programs significantly increased the

31 Patrice Iatarola, Dylan Conger, and Mark Long, "Determinants of Advanced High School Course Offerings," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 33, no. 3 (2011): 340–59.

32 David Ellwood and Thomas Kane, "Who is Getting a College Education? Family Background and the Growing Gaps in Enrollment," in *Securing the Future: Investing in Children from Birth to College*, eds. S. Sheldon Danziger and Jane Waldfogel (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000: 283–324); Jason Fletcher and Martha Tienda, "Race and Ethnic Differences in College Achievement: Does High School Attended Matter?" *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 627, no. 1 (2010): 144–66.

33 Unpublished research by Stella Flores and Toby Park finds that in Texas public schools, ELL waiver students fared worse than their similar nonwaiver ELL counterparts with regard to access to an advanced college-ready curriculum, high school degree completion, and postsecondary enrollment. Stella Flores and Toby Park, "The Effect of English Language Learner Identification on College Access Outcomes: Using Matching Techniques to Decipher the Role of Time in Program" (paper presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education Annual Conference, Charlotte, November 17, 2011).



chances of immediate college enrollment for all students.

One somewhat surprising result is that ELL students who worked while in school were more likely to go to college after graduation. While the research on working while attending high school has yielded mixed results for low-income students, ever-ELLs may be responding differently to work opportunities than their non-ELL counterparts.³⁴ This is perhaps one of the most complicated relationships to disentangle, as skills learned on the job may offer opportunities for stronger English language development, as well as accrued earnings for family and college expenses. However, the potential for interference with academic preparation is also very real, as exhibited by the negative coefficient of working while in high school for non-ELL students.

In sum, our regression results confirm our earlier descriptive findings that among ever-ELL students, Hispanics had the lowest rates of college enrollment, at least immediately after high school graduation. Students who were eligible for ELL instruction but opted out appear to fare worse than students who participated in language classes for three years. Moreover, we find that access to a college-ready curriculum in the form of high-level courses taken in high school, or dual-credit courses with local postsecondary institutions, is a predictor of immediate college enrollment regardless of ELL status. Thus, expectations for ELL students should go beyond the basic outcome of achieving English language proficiency, and should include the opportunity to participate in a college-preparatory curriculum that will pave the way for a better academic and economic future.

VI. Conclusions

Within the population of 5.3 million ELLs nationwide who rely on schools to gain the skills — including English language proficiency — needed for postsecondary and labor market success, ever-ELLs in the on-time cohort can be viewed as “successful” students because they progressed steadily through school without being retained in a grade.

The NCLB Act was not the first piece of federal legislation to safeguard these students’ equal access to and quality of education. However, by setting accountability measures and penalties around academic and language progress, the Act brought the growing population of ELLs into focus for federal, state, and local policymakers; educators; and advocates. With the law still up for reauthorization, experts, advocates, and Congress members are considering how to revise the legislation with regard to student performance targets, teacher evaluation, parental involvement, alignment of ELL instruction and content-area curricula, and setting college- and career-ready standards.³⁵ These issues are also being taken up within the context of the US Department of Education’s recent grant of waivers to a number of states from NCLB’s testing and outcome standards, with some advocates worrying that the law’s focus on ELLs may be diminished and reform opportunities missed.

This report builds upon two tenets of education reform over the past decade: the value of longitudinal data collection and analysis and the importance of disaggregating data and instruction for English

34 Susan Choy, *Low-Income Students: Who They are and How They Pay for Their Education* (Washington, DC: US Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2000169>; Gary Curtis and Carole Nummer, “To Work or Not to Work: That is the Question,” *Journal of Student Financial Aid* 21, no. 3 (1991): 16–26.

35 The Education Trust, “Letter to Senators Harkin and Enzi Regarding the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,” Washington, DC, October 11, 2011, www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/Harkin-Enzi-ESEA-goals-letter.pdf; The Working Group on ELL Policy, “Letter to Senators Harkin and Enzi Regarding the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,” October 25, 2011, www.edweek.org/media/workinggroup_letter_final.pdf; Alyson Klein, “Subgroup Accountability at Issue at ESEA Renewal,” *Education Week*, October 11, 2011, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2011/10/subgroup_accountability_at_iss.html.



language learners. In many ways our findings reinforce the value of both. Among other things the report underscores that classification as an ELL and receipt of English as a Second Language or bilingual instruction do not consign students to poor outcomes. Indeed Asian and white “on-time cohort” students who were ever classified as ELLs were almost as likely to graduate from high school as their non-ELL counterparts, while Black ever-ELLs were more likely to graduate from high school than their non-ELL counterparts.

The longitudinal data presented here also highlight the need to differentiate between short-term ELLs — especially those who transition out of ELL status after three years — and the long-term ELLs whose testing outcomes lag and who were less likely to matriculate to two or four-year institutions. Our results show that ELL students who started in first grade and progressed “on time” to grade twelve and who exited ELL programs within three years had much better outcomes than other ELL students as well as than their non-ELL counterparts. Still, more research is needed to understand the factors accounting for the success of some ELL students and the lack of progress of others.

Our analysis adds to the literature on the challenges of educating long-term ELLs and calls attention to the quality of education that these students receive to prepare them for graduation and post-graduation careers.³⁶ One promising strategy to assist all ELL students in keeping up with learning academic subjects is to align ELL curriculum and proficiency standards with those of academic subjects.³⁷ Earlier in 2011, a 27-state consortium — the World-Class Instruction Design and Assessment, or WIDA — announced that its English language proficiency standards aligned well with the common core content (math and reading) areas,³⁸ an initiative that might be expanded to other states.

*Preparing for college while in high school seems
to be a critical stepping stone for those who start
with a language disadvantage.*

Our findings reinforce other studies indicating that Hispanic high school graduates in general, and former ELL graduates in particular, are much more likely to attend two-year colleges rather than four-year institutions — in contrast to Asian and white students. Our own recent research underscores the economic advantages of four- versus two-year degrees.³⁹ Further, these results raise familiar concerns about the comparatively low graduation rates of all community college students, especially Hispanics.⁴⁰

While the results presented here hold some promise for students ever classified as ELLs, two separate findings give pause and merit attention. First, the results of the principal study group — students ever classified as ELL who proceed “on time” from first grade through 11th grade — are far superior to those of “all students” ever classified as ELL. This latter group includes those who entered the Texas system after the first grade, those who may have been held back, and those who may have dropped out, among others.

36 See Jorge Ruiz-de-Valasco, Michael Fix, and Beatriz Chu Clewell, *Overlooked and Underserved: Immigrant Students in U.S. Secondary Schools* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2001).

37 Margo Gottlieb, *Assessing English Language Learners: Bridges from Language Proficiency to Academic Achievement* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006).

38 World-Class Instruction Design and Assessment, “The WIDA Standards to Common Core State Standards Alignment Study,” http://wida.us/Research/Agenda/Alignment/WIDA-CommonCore_PressRelease.pdf.

39 Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix, *Up for Grabs? The Gains and Prospects of First- and Second-Generation Young Adults* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2011), www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/youngadults-upforgrabs.pdf.

40 Anthony Carnevale, “Postsecondary Education and Training As We Know It Is Not Enough” (paper presented at the Georgetown University and Urban Institute Conference on Reducing Poverty and Economic Distress after ARRA, Washington, DC, January 15, 2010), www.urban.org/publications/412071.html; Irwin Kirsch, Henry Braun, Kentaro Yamamoto, and Andrew Sum, *America’s Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation’s Future* (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 2007), www.ets.org/Media/Education_Topics/pdf/AmericasPerfectStorm.pdf.



Second, whereas the majority of the “on-time cohort” students (between 60 to 95 percent depending on students’ ELL status, race or ethnicity, and subject test scores) achieved the basic proficiency level (“met the standard”) on both math and reading tests, much lower shares (between 13 to 25 percent) of students reached the “commended performance” level. Knowledge and skills at the “commended performance” level will better ensure that graduates who matriculate are not forced into remedial or developmental courses in postsecondary institutions.

The regression analyses conducted on Texas student data presented here also offer important policy and practice insights. On the one hand, they appear to validate the importance of access to courses that offer college credit for advanced work in high school: these provide more stimulating instruction while compressing the time for learning. Preparing for college while in high school seems to be a critical stepping stone for those who start with a language disadvantage. On the other hand, the data raise serious doubts about the academic success of students whose parents opt out of English language development classes. This finding’s significance is reinforced by policies intended to make it easier for parents to make such a choice, such as those recently enacted in Florida.⁴¹ Finally, the results put into question whether employment interferes with students’ academic progress in high school. Indeed it may be the case that some exposure to work may improve ELLs’ academic performance.

41 Jackie Zubrzycki, “Florida Expands ‘Opt-Out’ Options for ELL Parents,” *Education Week*, September 30, 2011, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning-the-language/2011/09/ells_in_the_news_in_fl.html.



Appendix A

Table A.1. Percentage of On-Time Cohort Members Who “Met the Standard” on Math and Reading Tests, by ELL Status

	3rd	4th	5th	8th	10th	11th
Math						
Ever-ELL	64	75	86	71	55	72
Non-ELL	82	87	90	79	67	79
Reading						
Ever-ELL	65	71	79	85	69	84
Non-ELL	85	87	87	89	77	88

Source: Flores’ analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

Table A.2. Percentage of Students Who “Met the Standard” on Math and Reading Tests, by Race, Ethnicity, and ELL Status

	3rd	4th	5th	8th	10th	11th
Math						
Asian Ever-ELLs	71	83	94	90	85	92
White Ever-ELLs	77	85	91	82	71	82
Black Ever-ELLs	65	75	84	72	54	69
Hispanic Ever-ELLs	62	73	85	69	52	70
Reading						
Asian Ever-ELLs	70	80	90	95	84	95
White Ever-ELLs	79	83	87	90	75	89
Black Ever-ELLs	72	77	84	87	69	83
Hispanic Ever-ELLs	64	70	77	84	67	82
Math						
Asian Non-ELLs	95	97	98	95	92	96
White Non-ELLs	87	90	93	85	76	85
Black Non-ELLs	66	73	80	62	42	60
Hispanic Non-ELLs	77	85	89	73	57	73
Reading						
Asian Non-ELLs	95	97	97	98	89	97
White Non-ELLs	89	90	90	92	80	91
Black Non-ELLs	74	75	76	80	64	79
Hispanic Non-ELLs	82	85	85	88	74	88

Source: Flores’s analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.



Table A.3. Percentage of Ever-ELL Students in the On-Time Cohort, by Years in ELL Program, Who “Met the Standard” in Math and Reading (Compared to Non-ELL Students)

	3rd	4th	5th	8th	10th	11th
Math						
1-3 years	85	92	95	85	71	84
4 years or more	42	61	80	63	45	65
1-4 years	79	91	95	83	68	83
Exited after 3 years	87	94	96	86	72	86
5 years or more	35	49	74	57	39	59
7 years or more	35	39	54	39	26	44
Non-ELLs	82	87	90	79	67	79
Reading						
1-3 years	90	92	93	95	79	93
4 years or more	41	55	69	79	62	78
1-4 years	83	92	93	95	78	93
Exited after 3 years	93	94	94	96	80	94
5 years or more	33	39	59	73	57	73
7 years or more	34	32	32	52	44	55
Non-ELLs	85	87	87	89	77	88

Source: Flores's analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

Table A.4. Percentage of Members of On-Time Cohort and “All Students” Who “Met the Standard” in Math and Reading, by ELL Status

	3rd	4th	5th	8th	10th	11th
Math						
Ever-ELL On-Time Cohort	64	75	86	71	55	72
Non-ELL On-Time Cohort	82	87	90	79	67	79
All Ever-ELLs	42	44	58	18	13	34
All Non-ELLs	73	79	84	68	55	72
Reading						
Ever-ELL On-Time Cohort	65	71	79	85	69	84
Non-ELL On-Time Cohort	85	87	87	89	77	88
All Ever-ELLs	43	38	43	25	16	28
All Non-ELLs	77	79	80	83	69	83

Source: Flores's analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.

**Table A.5. Percentage of Members of On-Time Cohort and “All Students” Who Reached the “Commended Performance” Level in Math and Reading, by ELL Status**

	3rd	5th	8th	10th	11th
Math					
Ever ELL On-Time Cohort	14	30	5	7	13
Non-ELL On-Time Cohort	22	36	9	12	20
All Ever ELLs	6	10	1	1	3
All Non-ELLs	18	29	6	9	17
Reading					
Ever-ELL On-Time Cohort	16	20	19	3	15
Non-ELL On-Time Cohort	31	38	32	7	25
All Ever-ELLs	7	4	1	0	0
All Non-ELLs	24	29	24	5	21

Source: Flores's analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.



Appendix B

Factors Influencing the College Enrollment of the On-Time Cohort High School Graduates by ELL Status (logit results)

	Ever-ELL		ELL: Three Years		Never-ELL		Ever Waivered out of ELL Program	
Student demographics								
Hispanic	-0.713	***	-0.487	**	0.013		-0.902	***
Asian	0.310	*	0.444	*	0.298	***	-0.279	
Black	0.242		0.305		0.392	***	0.486	
Male	-0.164	***	-0.106	*	-0.206	***	-0.229	**
Economically Disadvantaged	-0.447	***	-0.397	***	-0.676	***	-0.625	***
Additional academic preparation								
Took and Passed AP/IB	0.622	***	0.563	***	0.318	***	0.504	***
Took and Passed Trigonometry	0.453	***	0.483	***	0.468	***	0.529	***
High School Math Exit Exam	0.022	***	0.020	***	0.025	***	0.026	***
Participated in Dual Credit	1.133	***	1.130	***	0.864	***	0.809	***
School characteristics								
Percent Minority in High School	-0.099		0.082		-0.090	*	0.343	
Per-Pupil Expenditure (logged)	0.402	*	-0.061		0.210	**	0.985	*
School Enrollment	0.011	***	0.006	*	0.003	**	0.008	
Urban High School	-0.088	*	-0.125		-0.136	***	0.037	
Other variables								
Worked while in High School	0.405	***	0.368	***	-0.049	**	0.312	***
County Unemployment Rate	0.029		0.037		0.006		-0.064	
Public School Institution within 25 miles of High School	-0.001		-0.030		0.135	***	-0.118	
State Regional Controls	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Constant	-3.919	*	-0.155		-2.036	***	-7.796	
N	20,213		8,528		97,483		3,762	
Chi sq.	4,730		1,810		17,511		903	

Note: The coefficients are statistically significant at * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Source: Flores's analysis of UTD-ERC data from 1995 through 2007.



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