

Implementing Structured English Immersion in Arizona: Benefits, Costs, Challenges, and Opportunities

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Abstract

This study conducted telephone interviews with 26 randomly selected English Language Coordinators from 26 Arizona school districts with enrollment patterns that were representative of the state as whole. Three primary questions were posed to the respondents:

- a. How is the 4-hour ELD block being implemented?
- b. What are the benefits of the 4-hour ELD block for students and for schools?
- c. What are the concerns about implementing the 4-hour ELD block?

The study found that all districts included in the study were implementing the 4 hour ELD block mandated for ELL students, but that there was considerable variation in some aspects of implementation. Although some districts recognized that their ELL students required additional support outside the 4-hour block, such as after school or summer programs (particularly for secondary students who were unable to take the courses they needed for graduation) and provided these services, two-thirds either chose not to or could not provide these services. With respect to benefits, the vast majority of ELCs focused on ELL students' English language development and additional teacher training that was provided. ELCs appreciated that the English instruction was less fragmented than in the past. Although most respondents did not feel teacher training was of better quality than they had received in the past, they were pleased that there was more of it. Regarding the costs/concerns of the program, ELCs mentioned that the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block has: (1) neglected core areas of academic content that are critical for ELL students' academic success and graduation, (2) contributed to ELL students' isolation, (3) limited ELL students opportunities for on-time high school graduation—potentially increasing drop out--and for college readiness, and (4) assumed that English language learning can be accomplished for all ELL students within an unrealistic timeframe and under a set of unrealistic conditions.

Executive Summary

Arizona's most recent ELL legislation, starting in the school year 2008-2009, requires that *all* ELL students be educated through a specific Structured English Immersion (SEI) model: the 4-hour English Language Development (ELD) block. The basic premise behind this particular model is that ELL students should be taught the English language quickly so they can then succeed academically.

This study is the first attempt to look at a random sample of 65 school districts across the state of Arizona under the 4-hour ELD block policy. The goal of the study is to better understand what are the positive aspects, and the major challenges of implementing the 4-hour ELD block in Arizona. In particular this study aims to answer the following questions:

- a. How is the 4-hour ELD block being implemented?
- b. What are the benefits of the 4-hour ELD block for students and for schools?
- c. What are the concerns about implementing the 4-hour ELD block?

In order to accomplish the goals of this study, the research team designed a phone survey for English Language Coordinators (ELCs). Of the 65 school districts randomly selected as potential participants, 26 agreed to participate in this study. The district response rate of the study was 40%, and the informants were the ELCs, who are the individuals most knowledgeable about how the 4-hour ELD block is implemented in their district. The sample of school districts that participated in our study is representative of the state of Arizona in terms of enrollment patterns. The data collected were analyzed using qualitative methods. More specifically, a coding scheme was created to assist in the process of organizing and analyzing the data. The findings of this study are presented around 4 themes: (a) implementation of the 4-hour ELD block, (b) benefits of the 4-hour ELD block, (c) concerns about the 4-hour ELD block, and (d) recommendations for improvement.

With respect to the implementation of the program, the data collected clearly show that there is variation in: (1) the types of programs offered to ELL students, (2) grouping criteria, and (3) the everyday academic experiences of ELL students. The data showed that school districts across the state are indeed providing the programs required by the Arizona law. In addition to providing these mandated programs, we found that about one-third (34%) of the sampled school districts are offering specific services/programs (e.g., after-school and summer programs) to support ELL students' English language development; two-thirds were either not able or chose not to offer these additional support services. We also found that 73% of school districts group ELL students by proficiency in the AZELLA test and by grade level. However, some variation in grouping criteria is present in seven school districts, particularly those with high percentages of ELL students. There is also variation in the type and amount of content-based instruction that ELL students get in a typical school day. Some school districts try to embed as much academic content as possible, but clearly missing from the ELL student experience was instruction in science and social sciences.

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Another finding of this study is that all of the school districts are following the state's regulations. However, we found that school districts want to have more flexibility in how the program is operated. This particular finding indicates, then, that one model of ELD instruction for every school district in Arizona is not what school districts need to meet the educational and language needs of their ELL students.

Respondents were queried about what they thought both the non-monetary benefits and costs of the 4-hour ELD were. With respect to benefits, the vast majority of ELCs focused on ELL students' English language development and additional teacher training that was provided. Fifteen percent of ELCs stated that a benefit of the program is an increase in reclassification rates in their school districts. Other school districts doubted that the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block has contributed to this increase. Regarding the costs/concerns of the program, ELCs mentioned that the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block has: (1) neglected core areas of academic content that are critical for ELL students' academic success, (2) contributed to ELL students' isolation, (3) limited ELL students opportunities for on-time high school graduation—potentially increasing drop out--and for college readiness, and (4) assumed that English language learning can be accomplished for all ELL students within an unrealistic timeframe and under a set of unrealistic conditions.

Given the data collected, it is clear that school districts throughout the state operate under very complex and unique conditions. Arizona Department of Education (ADE) needs to recognize that there are a number of logistical and resource challenges in providing the 4-hour ELD block. Taking into consideration the findings of this study, we offer the following recommendations:

- School districts need to explore alternative models of ELD instruction.
- ADE needs to question the existing assumptions (i.e., English proficiency can be reached in isolation from English proficient peers, with minimal academic content, and in one year) embedded in the 4-hour block of ELD instruction.
- ADE needs to assess whether the funding structure of the 4-hour ELD block should be modified.
- School districts need to monitor progress and effectiveness by looking at multiple indicators (i.e., reclassification, re-entry, and opting-out rates).
- School districts need to collect various types of data from administrators, leaders, teachers, students and families to learn more about their experiences with the program.
- School districts need to pay closer attention to the academic content areas that ELL students are missing as a result of the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block.

Failing to address the concerns that ELCs articulated will damage the possibilities of ELL students graduating high school, pursuing postsecondary education, and finding a secure place in the workforce.

Introduction

Arizona's approach to educating ELL students is different from many other states in the country (Davenport, 2008). Arizona's most recent ELL legislation, starting in the school year 2008-2009, requires *all* such students be educated through a specific Structured English Immersion (SEI) model: the 4 hour English Language Development (ELD) block. The basic premise behind this particular model is that ELL students should be taught the English language quickly so they can then succeed academically. The legislation also requires the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) to monitor and report on the success of the 4-hour ELD block, and the Auditor General to audit the model's effectiveness on performance-based outcomes (i.e., AIMS test scores) and an English proficiency test (Davenport, 2008). Unlike other states, for program entry, exit and monitoring, Arizona's school districts are required to use the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA). The AZELLA, according to ADE, is a comprehensive test that measures ELL students' abilities to speak, listen, read, and write in English.

This study is the first attempt to look at a random sample of school districts across the state of Arizona under the 4-hour ELD block policy. This study is particularly interested in documenting the benefits, costs, challenges, and opportunities generated by the implementation of this specific policy. In 2008, a report conducted by the Office of the Auditor General, examined the conditions of Arizona's ELL programs and available data before the policy was implemented. The findings from the Auditor General's report were based on a sample of 18 school districts and charter schools which operated different types of ELL programs during the fiscal years of 2007 and 2008. It is important to highlight that the instructional approaches used in these school districts were significantly different from the current SEI requirement regarding the 4-hour ELD block. The most important findings of the Auditor General's report are summarized as follows:

- Existing programs for ELL students vary widely.
- Few ELL students attained proficiency in one year.
- Basic student identification information was not present, and if present, was incorrect.
- Four percent of ELL students' overall proficiency levels were inaccurate or lacked valid assessments.
- Data collected in the sample districts had questionable entry and exit dates.

Furthermore, the Auditor General's report does *not* provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of the 4-hour ELD block. At the time the study was conducted, school districts were not required to implement the 4-hour ELD block. The report was created primarily with the intent to document existing programs and available data, and to provide a point of comparison for future audits. While the Auditor's report is not an evaluation of the 4-hour ELD block, it provided us with baseline data that informed the design of our survey, and most importantly, it helped us to give a context for the findings of our study.

The study we conducted during the Spring 2010 focused on the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block currently in place throughout the state of Arizona. A random sample of 65 school districts was selected to reflect different types of programs based on district size, location, and percentage of ELL students. The goal of the study is to better understand what are the positive aspects and the major challenges of implementing the 4-hour ELD block in Arizona. In particular this study aims to answer the following questions:

- a. How is the 4-hour ELD block being implemented?
- b. What are the benefits of the 4-hour ELD block for students and for schools?
- c. What are the district leaders' concerns about implementing the 4-hour ELD block?

It is expected that the information collected in this study can help decision-makers, researchers, and the public in general to learn more about: (1) the effectiveness of the 4-hour ELD block, (2) the challenges that school districts face implementing this program, and (3) the educational benefits of this program. We also provide some recommendations for school districts that can help them meet the language and educational needs of ELL students.

Methodology

Study Sample

In the Spring 2010, a total of 65 school districts were randomly selected from a list of existing school districts in the state of Arizona.¹ The list of school districts was put together by the ADE.² No specific criteria were used to select the school districts. We drew a random sample of school districts to learn about the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block across the state of Arizona. Of the 65 school districts randomly selected, 26 agreed to participate in this study. Thus, the district response rate of the study was 40%. It has been widely documented that response rates for phone surveys have consistently declined in the last years. Given this fact, the response rate for this study falls within a generally acceptable range (35% to 60%).³

The study's usefulness is strengthened by its similarity in enrollment to statewide patterns. Table 1 provides basic demographic information about the school districts participating in the study. As shown in Table 1, the school districts which participated in this study have very distinct characteristics. Some are very small districts (with one school) and others are very large school districts (with 121 schools). The data show that 73% of these school districts did *not* meet adequate yearly progress (AYP). The ethnic distribution of school districts is as follows: on average, 43% of students are White and 41% of students are Hispanic/Latina(o). With respect to poverty, on average, 43% of students enrolled in these school districts are eligible for free and

¹ A sample of 65 school districts was selected to ensure statistical precision.

² For a list of all school districts see <http://www.ade.state.az.us/schools/schools/districts.asp>

³ See Groves et al. (2004) for more details on response rates.

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reduced price lunch. Finally, on average, there are 14% of ELL students enrolled in these school districts. These statistics show that the sample of school districts in our study is indeed representative of the state of Arizona. The official data from the state indicate that 45% of students are White, 42% of students are Hispanic/Latina(o), 38% of students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch, and 11% of students are English Language Learners (ADE, 2010).

Table 1. Characteristics of School District included in the Sample (N=26)

School District	Total Enrollment	AYP 2007	% White	% Hispanic	% Free & Reduced	% ELL
School District A	1440	Met	70%	25%	44%	9%
School District B	122	Met	52%	27%	1%	17%
School District C	1302	Not met	2%	90%	96%	39%
School District D	5951	Not met	40%	40%	28%	5%
School District E	3820	Not met	1%	1%	99%	25%
School District F	24312	Not met	40%	50%	68%	24%
School District G	1441	Met	70%	25%	34%	14%
School District H	7698	Not met	40%	55%	60%	11%
School District I	16404	Not met	55%	38%	40%	10%
School District J	2520	Not met	NA	NA	77%	13%
School District K	453	Met	65%	25%	10%	2%
School District L	4984	Not met	15%	68%	74%	23%
School District M	5882	Met	89%	7%	5%	2%
School District N	1046	Not met	74%	21%	35%	1%
School District O	5022	Not met	37%	39%	12%	7%
School District P	59327	Not met	31%	55%	61%	13%
School District Q	1933	Not met	44%	29%	58%	2%
School District R	1316	Not met	44%	55%	69%	24%
School District S	26611	Not met	75%	16%	20%	7%
School District T	5767	Not met	82%	13%	22%	2%
School District U	271	Not met	4%	96%	89%	49%
School District V	3088	Met	45%	45%	37%	2%
School District W	8636	Not met	25%	70%	15%	4%
School District X	3016	Not met	10%	80%	72%	24%
School District Y	4695	Not met	35%	60%	9%	22%
School District Z	2552	Met	60%	35%	57%	18%
Average	7677		44%	43%	46%	14%
Std. Dev.	12528		0.25	0.25	0.29	0.12

Source: Common Core Data and Arizona Department of Education.

Survey Instrument

The research team designed a phone survey for English Language Coordinators [ELCs]. Most school districts have an ELC coordinator that is in charge of implementing and monitoring the SEI programs offered. The survey was informed by a review of literature on SEI models and by our own research with alternative programs used to teach English language learners. Once the survey was designed, we asked several experts in the field to provide us with their feedback. After the expert review phase was concluded, we piloted the survey in the Spring of 2010 with 3 ELCs in school districts that were not included in the random sample. We used a technique known as cognitive interviews to pilot and refine the survey.⁴ There are several advantages that cognitive interviews bring to survey design. With this technique, we were able to determine if the questions were understood, if potential participants could recall the required information, and to determine how complex was the respondent's process to provide accurate answers.⁵ The feedback gathered with the cognitive interviews was very helpful to arrive at a final design. The survey was completely anonymous, meaning that no identifiable data from the ELC were collected. It took ELCs approximately 15 to 20 minutes to answer to all the questions.

Data Collection

During the Spring 2010, the research team initiated contact via phone and email with the 65 selected school districts. Some ELCs (N = 35) did not respond to the email or phone invitation to participate in the study, other ELCs (N = 3) stated that the number of ELL students in their district was too small, thus they did not implement the 4-hour ELD block. Instead, they used the Individualized Language Learning Plans (ILLP) for their ELL students. Finally, one ELC was not interested in participating in the study. The phone surveys were recorded to facilitate the data analysis. Once the phone surveys were completed, the information contained in the audio files was summarized into an excel spreadsheet and then uploaded to a software for subsequent data analysis.⁶

Data Analysis

Given that most of the survey questions were open,-ended meaning that ELCs gave their opinions about the benefits, costs, and challenges of implementing the 4-hour ELD block, we used qualitative data analysis to examine the responses of the 26 ELCs. More specifically, a coding scheme was created to assist in the process of organizing and analyzing the data (see Appendix B for the list of codes generated for this study). Coding consists in dividing the data into smaller categories.⁷ We were also able to count how many times each code was mentioned across all the phone surveys (see Table 2). The purpose of coding is to group similar ideas

⁴ For details on survey questions of final design see Appendix 1

⁵ For more details on cognitive interviews see Torangueau (1984)

⁶ The research team used Atlas TI for all qualitative data analyses

⁷ See Rubin and Rubin (1995).

together and determine if themes, or more general concepts, emerge from the codes. These themes constitute the major findings of a study.

Findings

The findings of this study are summarized in Table 2 and presented around 4 themes: (a) implementation of the 4-hour ELD block, (b) benefits of the 4-hour ELD block, (c) concerns about the 4-hour ELD block, and (d) recommendations for improvement.

Table 2. Themes and Frequencies

Themes	Frequency (No. of times mentioned across all phone surveys)
a. Implementation	
1. Variations in implementation	76
2. State policies	29
b. Benefits	
1. Language acquisition	43
2. More training for teachers	38
3. ELL students re-entering 4-hour ELD block	14
4. More attention to ELL students	13
c. Concerns	
1. Segregation	87
2. English proficiency in one year	27
3. Financial resources	21
4. Lack of peer role models	17
5. Duration of the block	14
6. Time for graduation	9
d. Recommendations	
1. More academic content	69
2. Peer role models	17
3. Fewer hours	14
4. More flexibility in implementing	11

a. Implementation of the 4-hour ELD block

The data collected clearly show that there is variation in: (1) the types of programs offered to ELL students, (2) grouping criteria, and (3) the everyday academic experiences of ELL students. In what follows, we explain in more detail these findings.

Types of Programs

The data show that school districts across the state are indeed providing the programs required by the Arizona law. With respect to the types of programs offered to ELL students, we found the most common types of SEI programs offered across school districts to be the 4-hour ELD block and ILLPs. The later are offered in schools with very low percentages of ELL students. In addition to providing these mandated programs, we found that 34% of the participating school districts are offering specific services/programs to support ELL students' English language development. Two-thirds of districts do not offer these support services. Some school districts, for example, offer after-school programs, summer school, reading programs, and have available community specialists to work with families. Although we did not collect specific information about these additional programs, it is important to, at least, document their existence. In the future, it will be important to study these programs in more depth to examine if and how they complement the mandated 4-hour ELD block of instruction.

Grouping Criteria

Most school districts (73%), as specified in the Arizona legislation, group ELL students by proficiency on the AZELLA test and by grade level. However, some variation in grouping criteria is present in seven of the 26 school districts, particularly in those elementary schools with high percentages of ELL students. In these schools, ELL students who are in the same grade and whose proficiency level is the same, have their own classroom for the entire school day. Because of logistical challenges and class size requirements, these ELL students do *not* participate in mainstream classrooms with other non-ELL students. In schools where there are not enough ELL students to create a classroom, they are placed in mainstream classrooms and the school designs an individual plan for these students, so they can also receive the 4 hours of instruction in English that the law requires. Finally, we found that 30% of school districts contained in the sample mix ELL students with different proficiency levels to provide the mandated 4 hours of English instruction. These particular classrooms seem to have adopted a more traditional model in which ELL students from different grades are taught English by one teacher. This particular mode of implementation of the 4-hour ELD block needs to be studied in more depth to assess its effectiveness.

Academic Experiences of ELL students

There is variation in the type and amount of content-based instruction that ELL students get in a typical school day. In 73% of the sampled school districts, typically, ELL students have

the 4-hour of English instruction, then some instructional time in math (30 to 50 minutes) and then they take electives or arts and music or physical education. Clearly missing from the ELL student experience was content in science and social sciences. Although 15% school districts mentioned that they try to embed as much content instruction as possible, we found that very few school districts are providing ELL students with the academic content in *all* areas needed to graduate from high school and to succeed academically.

State Policies

Another finding of this study is that *all* of the school districts are following the state's regulations. Moreover, school districts claimed that existing state policies and guidelines regarding the 4-hour ELD block of instruction are clear and that the state provides adequate training and supervision of the program. However, we found that school districts want more flexibility in how the program is operated. Thirty four percent of districts mentioned that they would like more flexibility in the number of daily hours of instruction offered to ELL students and in the grouping criteria. Furthermore, a very high proportion of districts (69%) mentioned that they want to include compensatory assistance to help ELL students get the academic content that they need to achieve their educational goals. Finally, one school district mentioned that they wanted the state to allow for more exceptions. These findings indicate, then, that one model of ELD instruction for every school district in Arizona is not what many school districts feel they need to meet the educational and language needs of their ELL students. As one ELC stated "whatever works in your district with your kids is what should be used".

The following sections concentrate on a non-monetary cost/benefit analysis of the 4-hour ELD block mandated by the state of Arizona. Clearly, when ELCs discussed the benefits of the program, the vast majority focused on ELL students' English language development and teacher training. Fifteen percent (4 of 26) of ELCs stated that a benefit of the program is an increase in reclassification rates in their school districts. Other school districts doubted that the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block has contributed to this increase. Regarding the costs of the program, ELCs mentioned that the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block has: (1) neglected certain areas of academic content that are critical for ELL students' academic success, (2) contributed to ELL students' isolation, (3) limited ELL students opportunities for on-time high school graduation and for college readiness, and (4) assumed that English language learning can be accomplished for all ELL students under a set of unrealistic conditions.

b. Benefits of implementing the 4-hour ELD block

The data collected also indicated that there are some perceived benefits of implementing the 4-hour ELD block of instruction: (1) enhanced English language acquisition, (2) additional training for teachers, (3) more attention to ELL students, and (4) higher reclassification rates.

English Language Acquisition

A very high proportion of ELCs (81%) mentioned that the 4-hour ELD block gives teachers plenty of time to work on the development of their students' English language proficiency. Additionally, when asked how the ELD block meets the language needs of ELL students, 84% of school districts mentioned that the 4-hour ELD block helps them in the acquisition and development of English skills.

Training for Teachers

Ninety two percent of school districts mentioned that a great benefit of the SEI program has been the offering of additional training for teachers. However, less than half (42%) of ELCs stated that the training for SEI is much better than the previous training that teachers received regarding pull-out programs. As one ELC stated "the biggest benefit is extensive professional development, extensive training, all that is a benefit for the children". Clearly, ELCs appreciate the additional attention given to training teachers to undertake the ELD program.

More Attention to ELL Students' Language Needs

In response to the question about how the 4-hour block helped meet the language needs of students, all school districts mentioned that one of the most important benefits of the 4-hour ELD block is that it has brought more attention to ELL students' language needs. They stated that before the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block efforts were fragmented and progress (or lack of) was simply not monitored. According to 66% of ELCs, ELL students now have a concentrated amount of time to learn the English language. They also mentioned that there is explicit instruction depending on the proficiency level of the students.

Higher Reclassification Rates

Some ELCs (15%) mentioned that another benefit of the 4-hour ELD block is the increase in reclassification rates, meaning that more ELL students are reaching English proficiency levels. However, another 23% of ELCs mentioned that, while reclassification rates are higher in some schools, some ELL students are also re-entering the 4-hour ELD model after being designated English proficient for some time. We specifically asked ELCs what percentage of students, who were re-classified as English Proficient, have had to re-enroll in the 4-hour ELD block. Forty two percent of ELCs did not know the exact percentage. One ELC mentioned that the percentage of students who re-enroll was between 20% and 25%. Eleven percent of ELCs mentioned that re-enrollment rates were between 5% and 10%. And, 42% of ELCs stated that a very low percentage of students have had to re-enroll in the program. In these cases, ELC coordinators mentioned that when a student needs to be re-enrolled, the school has a conference with the parents, and they decide if their child re-enters the program or not. That is parents have the option of opting-out of the program. There are no available data to assess the extent of this problem, and perhaps school districts could benefit from knowing reclassification rates, re-entry rates, and opting-out rates to make better assessments regarding the efficacy and efficiency of the 4-hour ELD block.

c. Costs/concerns about implementing the 4-hour ELD block

The data that we collected show that school districts also have the following concerns about the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block of instruction: (1) segregation of students, (2) efficacy of the program, (3) lacking peer role models, (4) financial resources and (5) time to graduation.

Segregation of Students

The data show that a high proportion of ELCs (75%) are concerned about two aspects of segregation: (1) missing academic content, and (2) isolation of ELLs from their English proficient peers. In relation to what we label as *academic segregation*, we found that among the 75% of ELCs that are concerned about segregation, they also agreed that ELL students are missing academic content (e.g., math, sciences, history, and foreign language) that is critical to their academic success. In high schools, the problem may be more critical because ELCs mentioned that ELL students are missing electives as a result of the implementation of the 4-hour block. The following quote by an ELC summarizes this particular finding:

“In secondary classes ELL cannot take more math or other classes that regular students can, in elementary school they don’t have much time for math as other students are having. They try to have everyday social studies and math. As the electives are a lot and they have to choose it is hard to answer; however ELL students have fewer opportunities to participate in electives because of the 4-hour ELD block”.

It is important to note that 31% of ELCs mentioned that not all ELL students miss all content-area classes. It seems that the least proficient ELL students are the ones who miss the most academic content. Furthermore, from the data that we collected, it was evident that most teachers are trying to embed some content while teaching in the 4-hour ELD block. Nevertheless, the focus is on learning English, not other subjects.

With respect to social segregation, the majority of ELCs (that is 65% of participating school districts) mentioned that ELL students do not get to socialize with other students at the school. Moreover, ELCs stated that this segregation can hurt ELL students socially and emotionally. Half (50%) of all ELCs also indicated that ELL students are often shunned by other students. In other instances, as previously mentioned, ELL students spend all their time in school with other ELL students: they are never in mainstream classrooms because the number of ELL students in that particular grade is so large that it is not possible to accommodate them in regular classes and, at the same time, meet the required 4 hours of English instruction.

Efficacy of the 4-hour ELD block

All ELCs mentioned that English proficiency in one year is neither realistic nor reasonable. Indeed, ELCs argued that in order to develop English language proficiency it takes more than one year, probably between 3 and 4 years. Thus, the goal set by Arizona's law is, as stated by one ELC, "overly optimistic".

Financial Resources

Eighty five percent of ELCs consistently mentioned that funding is a strong concern for them because of the constant budget cuts. How are school districts going to support these students if it takes between 3 and 4 years to become English proficient? Arizona only provides additional funding for ELL students for two years, so those who do not reclassify within two years are no longer eligible for funded support. Furthermore, other ELCs stated that ELL students need a lot of support, beyond what the 4-hour ELD block of instruction provides. They clearly articulated that funding is crucial to fully support ELL students' language and academic needs.

Lacking Peer Role Models

Without hesitation, all ELCs stated that ELL students need to have other English proficient peers to be their role models. Some ELCs mentioned the need to mix ELL students with other non-ELL students. Other ELCs stated that, at the very least, it would be beneficial to mix ELL students of different proficiency levels. Thus, it is clear that ELCs perceived a need to re-think how English proficient students can support ELL students' English development. The interactions among students were believed to help ELLs develop the English language skills needed to succeed in school and to have the same educational opportunities as non-ELL students.

Duration of the ELD Block

Almost half (46%) of ELCs mentioned that they were concerned with the duration of the ELD block. More specifically, they mentioned that 4 hours of English instruction limited the amount of instruction in core content areas (e.g., math, science, and social science).

Time for Graduation and College Readiness

ELCs that work in school districts that have high schools mentioned they are worried that ELL students are taking longer to graduate. The State recommends that high school students graduate in 4 years, but with the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block, it can take ELL students much longer to graduate. As suggested by one ELC, this increased time to graduate, may raise the drop out rate among ELL students. Other ELCs mentioned that the courses ELL students miss are needed for graduation *and* for admission to college. The Arizona Board of Regents [ABOR] has established the following academic competency requirements for

admission to the 3 state universities: 4 units of English (including literature), 4 units of math, 3 units of laboratory science, 2 units of social science, 2 units of foreign language, and 1 unit of fine arts. As stated earlier, ELL students are missing important content areas (particularly in science and social science) that are needed for admission to college. Also, if the 4-hour block is implemented according to design, students would not be receiving instruction in literature and literary analysis through the ELD class. Thus, the program creates significant challenges for students wanting to pursue postsecondary education.

d. Recommendations for Meeting the Language and Educational Opportunities of ELL Students

We found in this study that there is variation in the types of programs and services offered to ELL students. This variation is not surprising, given that school districts vary in terms of size, number of ELL students, and terms of resources and support available to ELL students. School district leaders are deeply skeptical about the imposition of a single model for many different situations. It seems, then, that a *one-size-fits-all* approach to meet the language and educational needs of ELL students, as mandated by the state of Arizona, is neither realistic nor feasible, according to many of the ELCs. Indeed, school districts throughout the state operate under very complex and unique conditions. ADE needs to recognize that there are a number of logistical and resource challenges in providing the 4-hour ELD block. Given the data collected, we recommend that school districts explore alternative models of ELD instruction. These alternative models of ELD instruction need to take into consideration the local context of school districts, their resources, the variation in the needs of the students they serve, and existing research. Furthermore, we recommend that ELL students are offered additional programs or types of support that can help them become English proficient, while acquiring the academic content needed for succeeding in school. It seems reasonable to conclude that a combination of programs and support can be more effective than *one* prescriptive instructional approach.

In this study, we found that the 4-hour ELD block was believed to bring more focused instruction and more attention to ELL students. We also found that ELCs believe that the 4-hour ELD block is helping students acquire English skills, but not meet its stated goal because of unrealistic assumptions. In particular, none of the ELCs believed that English proficiency can be reached in isolation from English proficient peers, with minimal academic content, and in one year. The Auditor General's 2008 report also found that few ELL students attain proficiency in one year. Given these findings, it is crucial to examine alternatives to the present arrangement. Furthermore, the state needs to think more deeply about the allocation of financial resources to school districts. There is clear concern that the current funding structure is not efficient, particularly if it takes more than 3 years to develop English proficiency, and the state ends support for these students after two years.

We recommend that school districts monitor progress and effectiveness by looking at multiple indicators. In particular, we strongly suggest that school districts keep track of reclassification, re-entry, and opting-out rates for the ELL population. The latter are also

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important indicators of efficacy. In addition, it will be important that the school districts regularly interview students, teachers, and school administrators to learn about their experiences and challenges. The collection of different types of data can assist in better understanding the barriers and opportunities that school districts face. Furthermore, it can help school administrators and policy-makers to design more effective and efficient programs that can meet the language and educational needs of ELL students.

Finally, we suggest that school districts need to pay closer attention to the academic content areas that ELL students are missing as a result of the implementation of the 4-hour ELD block, and to closely monitor course failure rates, drop out, and percents of ELL who are able to qualify for college admission. Clearly, ELCs believe that on-time high school graduation and college readiness are major concerns. Recent statistics indicate that ELCs concerns are of extreme importance. To be more specific, about 75% of all Arizona students pass the state’s high school exit exam in reading/language arts on their first try. Meanwhile, 66% of all students pass the exit exams in writing and math (Center on Education Policy, 2007). For Arizona’s English Language Learners [ELL]—a fast growing group of students whose native language is not English—the picture is far worse. Only about 12% of ELLs pass the state’s reading and writing exit exams on the first try, while 20% pass the math exam, making the ELL student group the most likely to fail the exit exams on their first try (Center on Education Policy, 2007). Even when cumulative rates are taken into consideration, ELL students have the lowest passing and high school graduation rates (see Table 3). It also appears that Arizona is losing more than 40% of its ELLs before high school graduation; they have the lowest graduation rate of any group including the learning disabled. No state can afford such high levels of failure for a significant portion of its population.

Table 3. AIMS High School Exit Exam Initial and Cumulative Pass Rates, 2005-2006

Student Group	Math		Reading/Language Arts		Writing		High School Graduation Rate
	Initial Pass Rate	Cummulative Pass Rate	Initial Pass Rate	Cummulative Pass Rate	Initial Pass Rate	Cummulative Pass Rate	
All students	64.50%	76.90%	71.00%	80.10%	64.10%	80.90%	75.00%
White	78.30%	84.10%	85.20%	86.70%	75.40%	86.90%	83.00%
Hispanic/Latina(o)	49.70%	68.10%	55.60%	71.50%	49.80%	73.00%	64.00%
African American	50.50%	66.30%	62.40%	73.60%	58.30%	74.80%	72.00%
Asian American	82.90%	85.20%	81.70%	84.40%	78.20%	84.70%	86.00%
Native American	41.40%	62.70%	47.50%	69.90%	51.70%	70.50%	59.00%
ELL	20.70%	46.40%	12.60%	34.00%	12.40%	37.40%	59.00%
Migrant	44.30%	72.10%	40.40%	63.20%	32.70%	66.80%	75.00%
Students with Disabilities	21.40%	14.20%	29.20%	27.40%	18.90%	26.20%	61.00%
Economically Disadvantaged	48.70%	68.20%	54.00%	70.90%	48.60%	72.10%	75.00%

Source: Center on Education Policy (2007)

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Appendix A

Survey Questions asked to English Language Coordinators

1. How long have you been an EL Coordinator in your school district?
2. What is the highest level of education that you attained?
3. What type(s) of program(s) for English Language Learners is/are currently in place at your school district?
4. How long has SEI/4-hour ELD block been in place in your school district?
5. What is the total number of ELL students in your school district?
6. What is the total number of SEI-endorsed teachers in your school district?
7. How do you group your ELL students in the SEI/4-hour ELD block?
8. Give an example of a typical school day for an English Language Learner.
9. Give an example of a typical school day for a non-English Language Learner
10. What content-area classes do ELL students miss during a school day as a result of participating in SEI/4-hour ELD block?
11. What school activities do ELL students miss during a school day as a result of participating in SEI/4-hour ELD block?
12. In your opinion, how does the SEI/4-hour ELD block meet the language needs of ELL students?
13. In your opinion, how does the SEI/4-hour ELD block meet the educational needs of ELL students?
14. Do local & state policies give you guidance and direction on how to put implement the SEI/4-hour ELD block) for ELL students?
15. Do you think it would be a more effective strategy to have after-school classes or Saturday classes instead of the daily SEI/4-hour ELD block?
16. What are your concerns about implementing SEI/4-hour ELD block?
17. In your opinion, how similar or different is the 4-hour block from ESL or resource pullout programs at your school in the past?
18. What are the benefits of the SEI/4-hour ELD block for your ELL students?
19. What are the benefits of the SEI/4-hour ELD block for your school?
20. In your opinion, does the 4-hour ELD block will help all ELL students become proficient in English in one year?
21. What percentage of students, who were “re-classified” as English Proficient, have had to re-enroll in the SEI/4 hour ELD block?
22. If you had the chance to change something about the SEI/4-hr ELD block, what would you change?

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Appendix B

Codes for Data Analysis

1. English versus content
1.1 Language acquisition
1.2 Use of first language
1.3 Academic content
1.4 Language Ideology
2. Instructional strategy/model
3. State policies
3.1 Difficulty implementing
3.2 Prescriptive
3.3 Flexibility
3.4 Monitoring
4. Benefits
4.1 More focus/attention on ELL
4.2 Training for teachers
4.3 Few students re-entry
5. Concerns
5.1 Time for graduation
5.2 Financial resources
5.3 Monitoring
6. Segregations
6.1 Lacking peer role models
6.2 Missing content
6.3 Missing other school activities
7. Assessments - AZELLA