

Sixth Grade Newcomers in the Fort Worth Independent School District

A Focus on Academic Trajectories and Outcomes

Descriptive Report

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Haiwen Chu

Anthony B. Fong

Exploring Longitudinal Outcomes and Trajectories of English Language Learners (ELOTE)

Steering Committee

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Michael Sorum, Deputy Superintendent of Leadership, Learning, & Student Support, Fort Worth Independent School District

Mariagrazia Sheffield, Assistant Superintendent of Special Programs, Fort Worth Independent School District

Suann Claunch, Director K-12 ESL, Fort Worth Independent School District

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Exploring Longitudinal Outcomes and Trajectories of English Language Learners (ELOTE)

ELOTE is a Researcher-Practitioner Partnership funded by the United States Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences.¹ Practitioners in the Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) partner with researchers from the Quality Teaching for English Learners initiative at WestEd to investigate academic trajectories and outcomes of secondary immigrant newcomers. ELOTE will identify promising programs and practices. Phase One of ELOTE consists of analyzing longitudinal data in FWISD. The findings that emerge from Phase One will inform the selection of school sites for Phase Two, which will be case studies of promising programs and practices. The understandings that emerge from these two phases will directly inform policy, programs, and practice within the district.

English Language Learners in Texas and Fort Worth

English language learners (ELLs) are a large and growing population within the United States, Texas, and Fort Worth. Nationally, ELLs constituted 9.1 percent of the K-12 public school population, or 4.4 million students in the 2011-2012 school year (Kena et al., 2014). Texas enrolled approximately 809,000 ELL students in the 2013-14 school year, or 16.5% of all K-12 public school students (Texas Education Agency, 2015). Within the FWISD, the ELL population has grown both numerically and as a fraction of the total school population, from 21,300 in 2003-2004 to 25,800 in 2013-2014, corresponding to an increase from 26.6% to 30.6% of the district population.

Ensuring that the unique educational needs of ELLs are met is an urgent priority. FWISD has a program designed to challenge and support secondary immigrant newcomers. When new immigrant students enter FWISD, they first attend the International Newcomer Academy (INA) for one year. At INA, students enroll in content-area classes taught by teachers who work in interdisciplinary teams sharing a group of students. After one year at INA, students enroll in Language Center programs hosted at four middle school and seven high school sites. These Language Centers provide sheltered support in content-area classes for academic and English language development. As students make progress toward being reclassified as English proficient, they enroll in Transition English as a Second Language (ESL) or mainstream classes. This sequence of programs is different from those in other districts across the state and country, which may include mainstream classes with various models of ESL support, small programs hosted at comprehensive high schools, two-year programs for newcomers, or four-year newcomer high school programs.

¹ The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U. S. Department of Education, through Grant R305H140032 to WestEd. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U. S. Department of Education.

This Report

This report contributes to understanding of the academic trajectories of ELL students within the FWISD. We focus on all students who enrolled as first-time sixth graders at the International Newcomer Academy (INA) in the 2006-2007 school year, a cohort of 48 students. We then follow these students through their enrollment in FWISD. This cohort was selected because its members would have been ninth graders in the 2009-2010 school year, connecting this report with a previous report on high school newcomers (Chu & Fong, 2015). We also explore the longitudinal English language proficiency growth of this cohort over the middle school years.

By adopting a longitudinal approach, this report contributes to knowledge about how secondary immigrant newcomers make academic progress. The state mandates mostly cross-sectional reporting on ELLs. State assessments in math and English language arts include reports which have current ELLs as a subgroup. The state also monitors for two years the test scores of students reclassified as English proficient. These reports of subgroup performance are cross-sectional and cannot describe how individual students grow over time. Although the state English language proficiency testing system does report year-to-year growth on an aggregated basis, it does not track student growth over a more extended period of time, such as the three years which are the focus of this report².

This report provides initial demographic and descriptive information about one group of sixth grade students. We analyze English language proficiency as discrete performance levels. Future reports will model English language proficiency growth as a continuously-scaled variable, and compare sixth grade newcomers with other sixth grade ELLs in the district. Future reports will also compare the trajectories of subgroups defined by language and countries of origin, identifying predictors of graduation outcomes as well as indicators that students may be at-risk of not graduating.

Research Questions

This report answers the following research questions:

- I. What are the demographic characteristics of sixth grade newcomers who enroll at INA?
- II. How long do secondary immigrant newcomers stay in the district?
- III. What campuses do secondary immigrant newcomers attend after they leave INA?
- IV. How quickly do secondary immigrant newcomers make progress in English language proficiency?
- V. What are the graduation outcomes of secondary immigrant newcomers?

² Beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, the state now has included an "ELL Progress Measure" as part of its accountability system, but this measure did not exist in the time period covered by the report.

I. What are the demographic characteristics of sixth grade newcomers who enroll at INA?

The sixth grade newcomers at INA in the 2006-2007 had slightly more female (56%) than male (44%) students (see Table 1). A large majority of students (85%) were Latino and spoke Spanish as their home language.³ Two thirds of all students were from Mexico, and the second most common country of origin was the United States (13%).⁴ Almost all students (96%) in our cohort were eligible for free- or reduced-price lunches.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Sixth Graders at INA in 2006-2007

Gender		Ethnicity		Country of Origin		Home Language		Lunch Status	
Female	27 56%	Asian	4 8%	Mexico	32 67%	Spanish	41 85%	Ineligible	2 4%
Male	21 44%	Black	3 6%	USA	6 13%	Burmese	2 4%	Free	42 88%
	48	Latino	41 85%	Sudan	2 4%	Arabic	1 2%	Reduced	4 8%
		White	0 0%	Honduras	2 4%	Somali	1 2%		48
			48	Burma	2 4%	Other	3 6%		
				Other	4 8%		48		
					48				

II. How long do secondary immigrant newcomers stay in the district?⁵

Students exit the district for a variety of reasons, such as to return to their home country, to transfer to another district, or to drop out of school. As shown in Table 2, the most common occurrence was for students to remain in FWISD for seven years (35%). The next most common occurrence was for students to leave the district after the first year (23%). The large number of students who leave after only one year suggests that additional interventions may be necessary to ensure that students transfer successfully from INA to another middle school within the district after their sixth grade year. Figure 1 graphically displays the relative sizes of the leaver subgroups compared to students who remained enrolled.

³Statewide, 90% of ninth grade ELLs are Spanish speakers, and 94% of sixth grade ELLs in FWISD are Spanish speakers (Texas Education Agency, 2015).

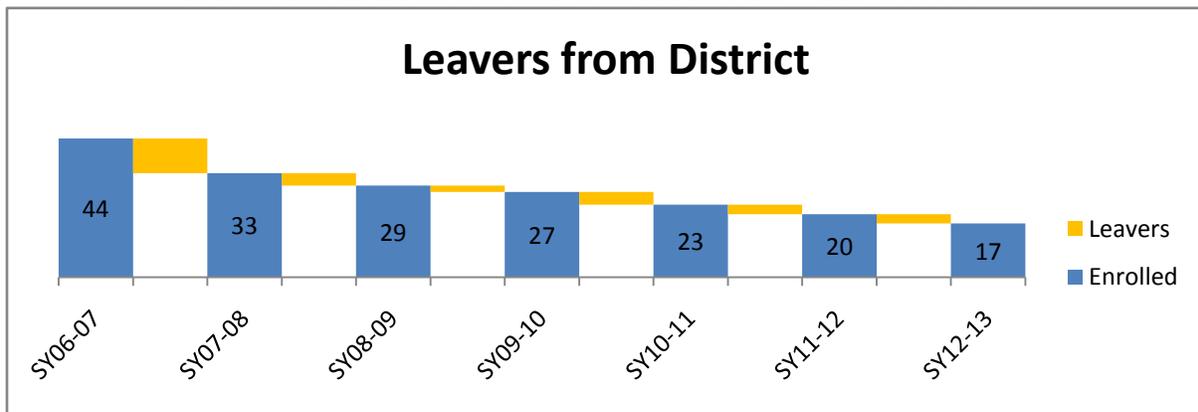
⁴ District placement policies consider students born in the United States to be immigrants if they have recently migrated from a foreign country.

⁵ Throughout this report, we use the term “leaver” to refer to any student who is not in the data set for all seven years.

Table 2
Length of Consecutive Enrollment of INA Sixth Graders

Total consecutive years in district	Frequency	Percentage
One	11	23%
Two	4	8%
Three	2	4%
Four	4	8%
Five	3	6%
Six	3	6%
Seven	17	35%
Non-consecutive years	4	8%
Total	48	

Figure 1
Leavers and Still-Enrolled Students from INA 2006-2007 Sixth Grade Cohort



III. What campuses do secondary immigrant newcomers attend after INA?

Of the thirty-four students who remained enrolled for a second year, seven students (15%) remained at INA. After two years at INA, four of these students enrolled at William James Middle School, and the other three were enrolled at Rosemont, McLean, and Meadowbrook Middle Schools.

The other 27 students who remained in FWISD in 2007-2008 were distributed across multiple middle schools, none of which enrolled more than seven students (Table 3).⁶

Table 3
Distribution of INA Sixth Graders across Middle School Campuses

Middle School Campus	SY07-08	SY08-09
Rosemont	6	7
Meacham	5	4
Stripling	5	2
Elder	3	3
William James	2	6
McLean	2	3
Riverside	2	2
Daggett	1	1
Meadowbrook	1	2
Middle Level Learning Center	0	1
Kirkpatrick	0	1
INA	7	0

⁶ Since the time period covered in this report, the district has consolidated middle school Language Center programs into four sites.

The pattern of dispersion across campuses continued in high school, with no campus enrolling more than eight students from the analytic cohort (Table 4). This wide dispersion suggests that students who initially enroll at INA reside throughout the entire district.

Table 4
Distribution of INA Sixth Graders across High School Campuses

High School Campus	SY09-10	SY10-11	SY11-12	SY12-13
Carter-Riverside	2	2	3	3
Arlington Heights	2	1	1	0
South Hills	8	6	6	6
Diamond Hill Jarvis	1	0	0	0
Eastern Hills	2	1	0	0
North Side	3	3	2	1
Polytechnic	2	2	1	1
Paschal	3	2	3	3
Southwest	1	1	1	1
Western Hills	4	5	5	3
Detention Center	1	0	0	0

IV. How quickly do secondary immigrant newcomers make progress in English language proficiency?

Students' English language proficiency is measured in this report using the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS). The TELPAS consists of four domains: Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing. These scores are weighted to produce a continuously-scaled Composite Score which is then converted into a Composite Rating, which is a whole number from 1 to 4. The Reading Scale Score is based on a multiple-choice exam and is weighted as 75% of the Composite Score. The Writing (15%) score is based upon holistically rated student writing collections, while the Speaking and Listening (5% each) scores are holistically assessed by ongoing classroom observation. The numerical values of the Composite Rating range from 1 to 4 and correspond to the following performance levels: Beginning, Intermediate, Advanced, and Advanced High.

There are a number of challenges in describing growth in English language proficiency among English Language Learners. The first is that after English language learners are reclassified, they no longer take the TELPAS test. A second challenge is that TELPAS scores may not exist in all years for all students, even for those students who did not get reclassified.⁷ The third challenge is that the nature of the variables differs. The Speaking, Listening, and Writing scores are discrete, ordinal variables. Unlike the Speaking, Listening, and Writing scores, the Reading Scale Score is vertically aligned and continuous. The Reading, Speaking, Listening, and Writing scores are then weighted to produce a continuous Composite Score. For the purposes of this report, all scores are treated as ordinal variables. This report thus can only describe categorical changes in ratings levels, which may not fully capture growth that a student experiences within a performance level. Future reports will analyze the Reading scale score and Composite Score, both of which are continuous variables.

In this section we describe growth in TELPAS scores in three ways, with a focus on the middle school years. First, we consider the overall distribution of the composite ratings for students who have complete sets of scores in the middle school grades. Second, we report, for students with complete sets of scores, the percentage of students advancing at least one rating level. This measure is of practical significance because the state-generated TELPAS campus summaries report data in this manner. The descriptive analysis presented below provides greater detail than the standard reports issued by the state since the descriptive analysis presents results for the individual domains of Speaking, Listening, Writing, and Reading. Finally, we report reclassification outcomes and examine the English language proficiency growth of reclassified students.

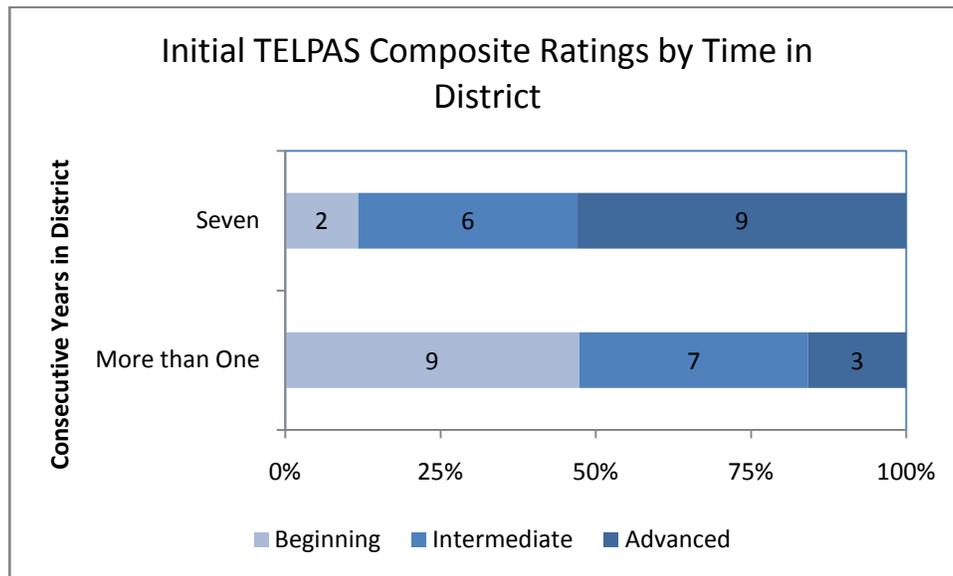
⁷ We decided to analyze TELPAS scores in this report because students are initially exempt from the state's standardized testing. In other words, TELPAS scores represented the best measure available for secondary immigrant newcomers.

First-year TELPAS Comparison

Prior to examining growth, we compare the TELPAS Composite Ratings of students across groups of students defined by when they left the district. Students who were only in the district for one year were missing data at a high rate (5 out of 11, or 45%). Of the six tested students who left after one year, exactly half were Beginning and the other half was Advanced.

Of the remaining students with first-year test scores, 17 remained for all seven years through 2012-2013. Nineteen students left prior to the 2012-2013. More than half of students who stayed in the district for seven years were rated as Advanced in their first year (Figure 2). By contrast, nearly half of students who left before seven years were rated as Beginning (47%). These distributions suggest that there is variation across leaver subgroups in terms of initial English proficiency. More specifically, students who remain in the district for the full seven years are more likely to have higher initial English proficiency than students who do not remain in the district.

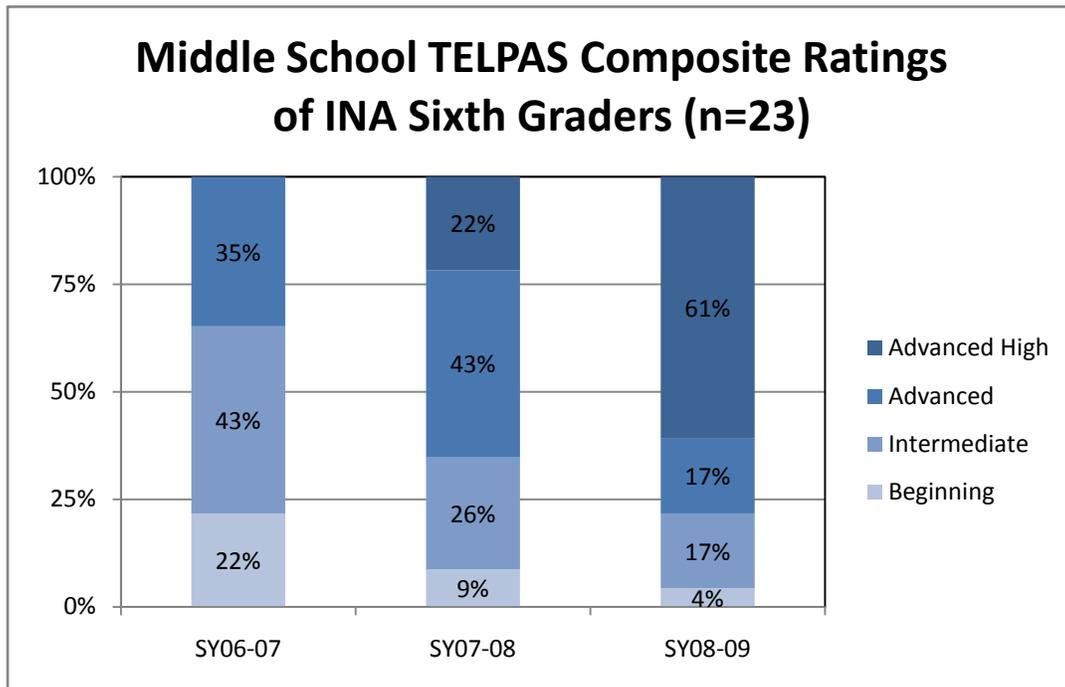
Figure 2
Initial TELPAS Composite Ratings by Time in District



Composite Ratings of Students with Complete Scores

This section focuses on a subgroup of 23 students who had scores each of the three consecutive years they were enrolled in the middle school grades. English language proficiency growth was rapid across the middle school years. As sixth graders, just over one third of students (35%) were rated Advanced in 2006-2007. By the second year in 2007-2008, the percentage of students rated Advanced or higher had nearly doubled, to 65%. By their third year in the district, more than three quarters (78%) of students were rated Advanced or higher. The percentage of students rated Advanced High increased 39 percentage points between the second (2007-2008) and third (2008-2009) school years. This figure underscores the high rates of growth in English language proficiency in the middle school years for our cohort of students.

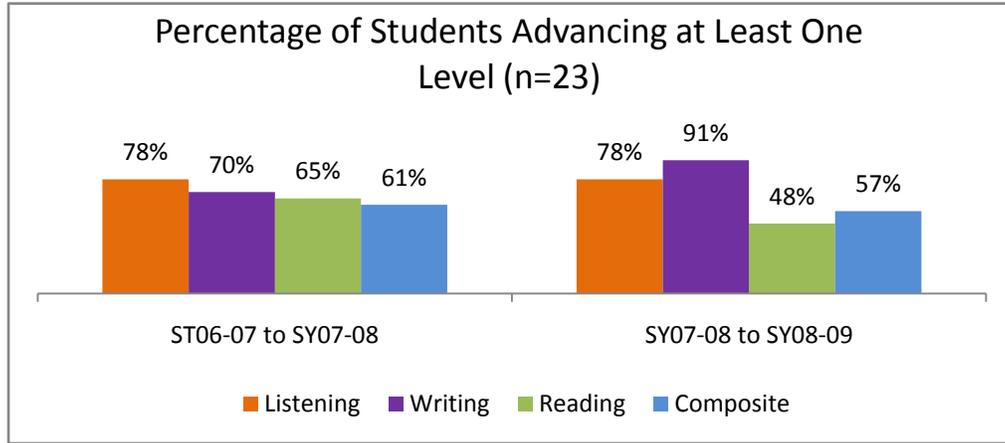
Figure 3
Middle School TELPAS Composite Ratings of Sixth Graders with Three Scores



Individual Student Progress on TELPAS by Domain

A finer-grained way of measuring progress is to look beyond the aggregate distribution of Composite ratings and into whether individual students make progress on individual domains of the TELPAS from one school year to the next (Figure 4). Speaking ratings were not available for the 2006-2007 school year, and so they are not reported. This figure shows that, with the exception of Reading from 2007-2008 to 2008-2009, at least half of the students improved in each domain in each year of middle school.

Figure 4
Students Advancing at Least One TELPAS Level



Similar to Figure 3 (Middle School TELPAS Composite Ratings), Figures 5 and 6 report improvements in the TELPAS ratings in the middle school years. Figure 5 corresponds to the Listening domain, while Figure 6 corresponds to the Writing domain. Both show large improvements, with over 80% of students Advanced or Advanced High in the 2008-2009 school year.

Figure 5

TELPAS Listening Ratings for Students with Three Scores (n=23)

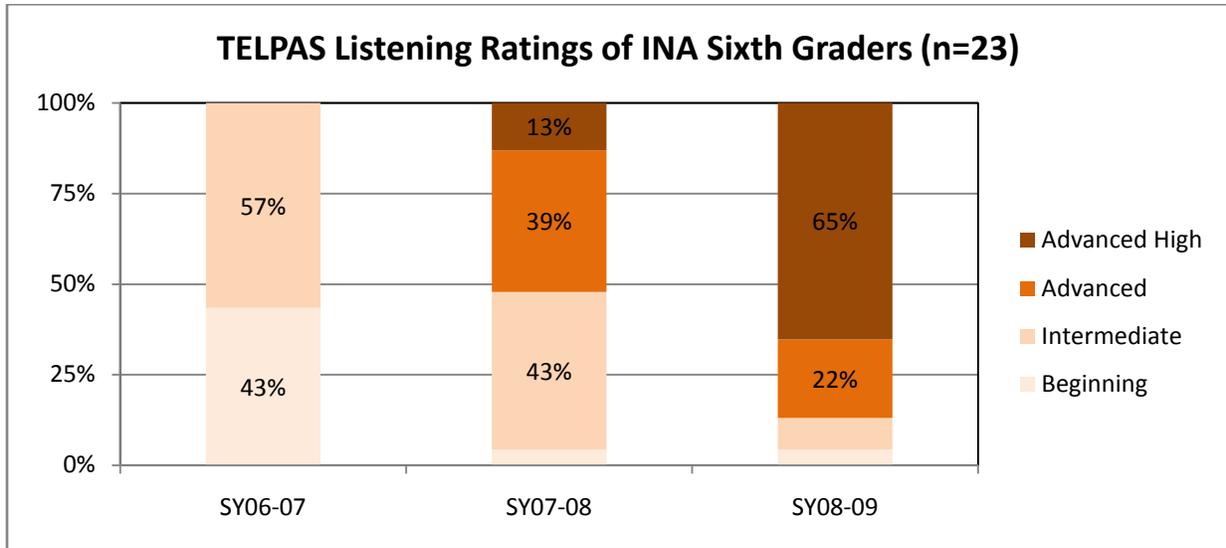
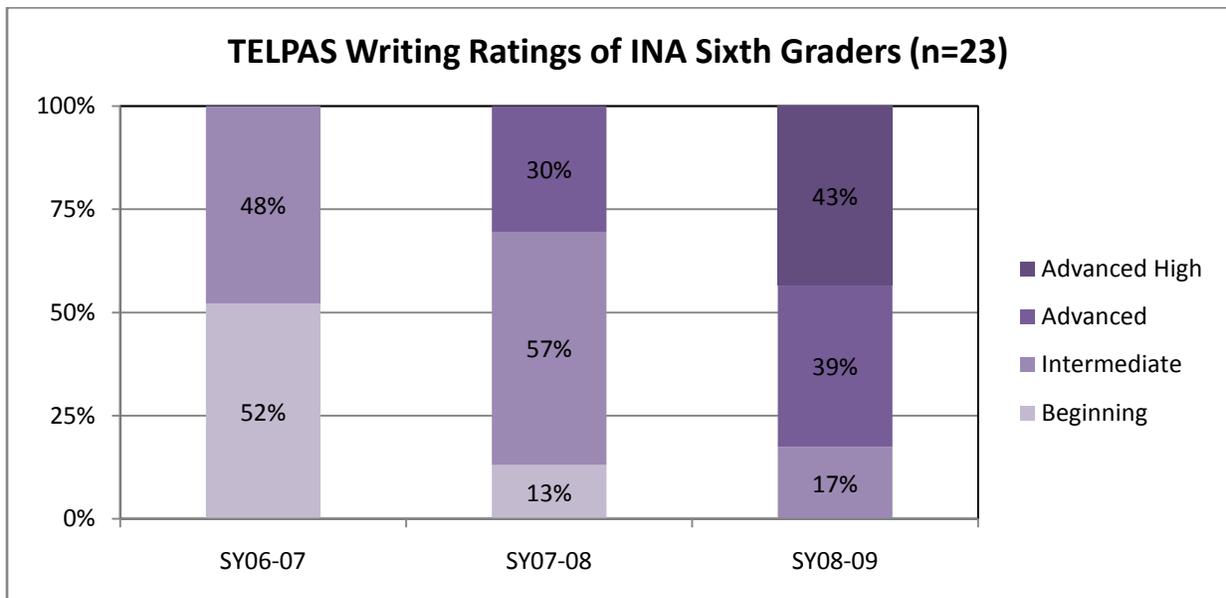


Figure 6

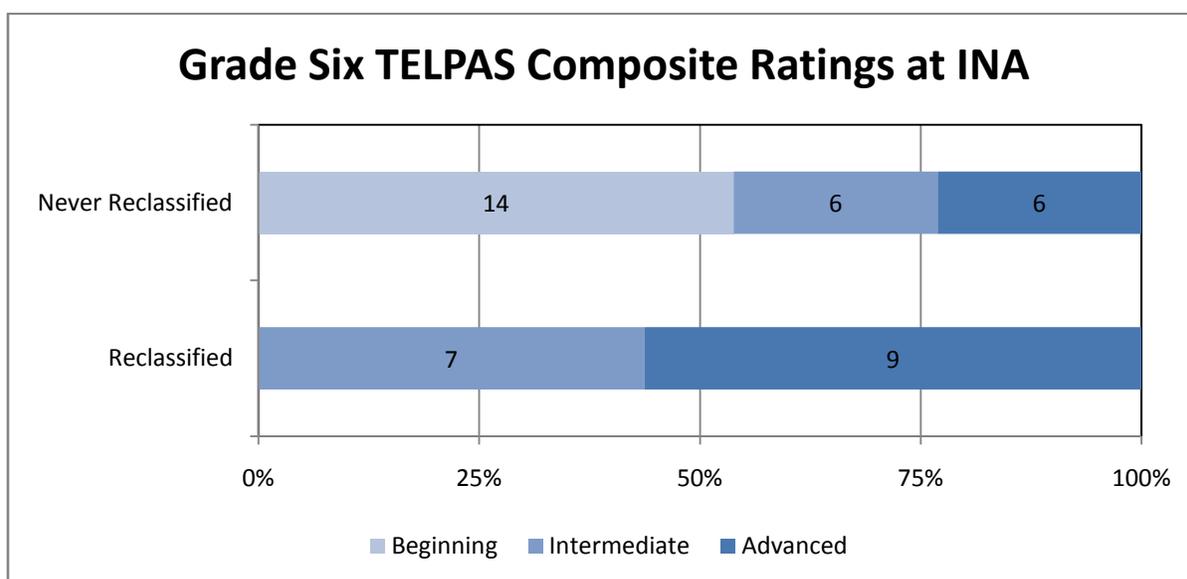
TELPAS Writing Ratings for Students with Three Scores (n=23)



Demographic Characteristics and English Language Proficiency Growth of Reclassified Students

A total of 16 students out of the 48 students who were sixth graders at INA in 2006-2007 were reclassified in the district as English proficient between 2006-2007 and 2012-13⁸. Most of the reclassified students (10 students, or 63%) were reclassified in seven or eighth grade. Reclassified students had higher TELPAS Composite Ratings as sixth graders when compared to students who were never reclassified (Figure 7). In fact, over half (56%) of students who were eventually reclassified tested as Advanced their first year in the district. Out of fourteen students, none of those rated at the Beginning level on the TELPAS were ever reclassified in the district. Alternatively, Figure 7 shows that 9 out of 15 students (60%) who originally were Advanced on the TELPAS composite eventually were reclassified in the district. Seven out of 13 students (54%) who originally scored Intermediate were reclassified in the district.

Figure 7
Sixth Grade TELPAS Composite Ratings by Reclassified Status



Thirteen of these sixteen reclassified students graduated (81%). These differences based on reclassification status indicate that initial English proficiency may be a decisive factor in summative outcomes.

⁸ It is possible that students who transferred out of FWISD were reclassified in another district.

V. What are the graduation outcomes of secondary immigrant newcomers?

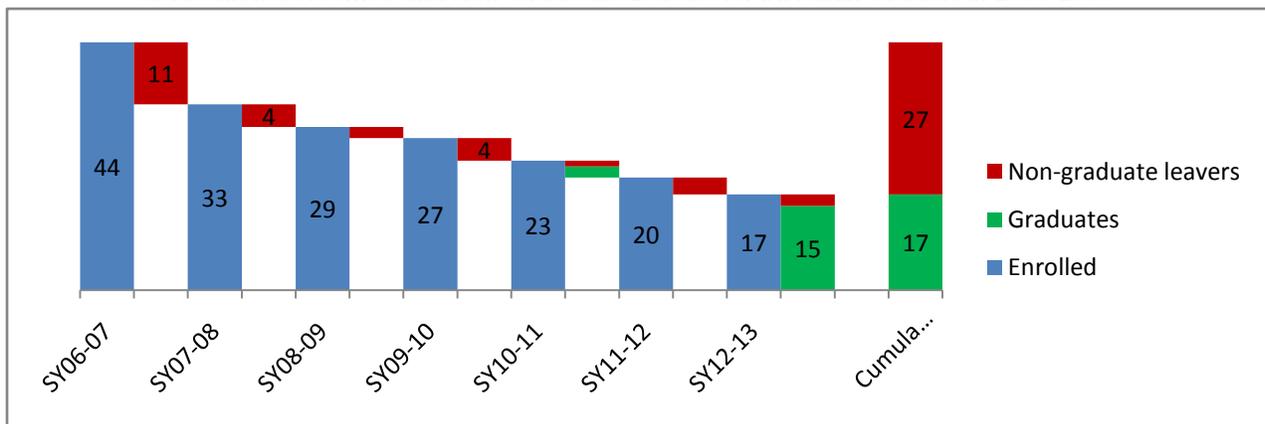
Of the original cohort of 48 INA sixth graders, twenty-eight⁹ students were still enrolled in the district three years later, as ninth graders. Of these twenty-eight students, seventeen (61%) graduated from FWISD.¹⁰ The group of graduates included more female students (71%) than the original cohort of 48 students (56%).

Table 5
Demographic Characteristics of Graduates

Gender		Ethnicity		Country of Origin		Home Language		Lunch Status	
Female	12 71%	Asian	1 6%	Mexico	12 71%	Spanish	15 88%	Ineligible	3 18%
Male	5 29%	Black	1 6%	USA	2 12%	Burmese	1 6%	Free	13 76%
	17	Latino	15 88%	El Salvador	1 6%	Somali	1 6%	Reduced	1 6%
		White	0 0%	Somalia	1 6%		17		17
			17	Burma	1 6%				
					17				

Further analysis distinguishes graduate and non-graduate leavers for 44 students over the four years in this study (Figure 8)¹¹. The number of leavers in each year corresponds to Figure 1. For instance, out of the 44 students who were enrolled in the 2006-2007 school year, 11 did not return to FWISD in the 2007-2008 school year.

Figure 8
Graduation Outcomes and Non-Graduate Leavers for INA Sixth Graders in 2006-2007



⁹ Twenty-eight students from the original cohort were enrolled as ninth graders in FWISD. One student, however, had left the district and returned. Figure 8 displays only the 27 students who never left the district.

¹⁰ The students may have graduated either from FWISD or from another school district.

¹¹ This group of 44 students exclude the four students who were enrolled in FWISD in non-consecutive years. This selection was made to focus on a group of students that could only decrease in number over time. This subset represents more than 90% of the cohort.

Summary

This descriptive report about a cohort of secondary immigrant newcomers in FWISD provides a first look at demographic characteristics and academic outcomes. The majority of our ELL cohort is Spanish speaking and eligible for free- or reduced-price lunch. The students tend to be very mobile: about one quarter of the students left the district after the first year, and more than half of the cohort left the district within six years. In our analysis of academic outcomes we found that the students in our cohort usually improved on the TELPAS over time. For instance, among students with three years of TELPAS scores, the percentage of students scoring Advanced or higher increased from 35% in the first year to 78% in the third year. When looking at reclassification rates, however, we found that only 33% of the cohort of students were reclassified within FWISD.

Highlights

- The cohort of sixth grade newcomers at INA in 2006-2007 was largely Latino (85%) and eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (96%).
- About one quarter of sixth grade newcomers left the district after one year.
- Within six years, half of the cohort of sixth grade newcomers had left the district.
- After sixth graders left INA, they widely dispersed across many middle and high schools.
- Sixth grade newcomers who stayed in the district for seven consecutive years had higher initial English proficiency than those who left at some point.
- On the individual level, more students made progress from year to year on Listening (78%) and Writing (from 70% to 91%) than on reading (from 48% to 65%).
- None of the sixth grade newcomers who were initially rated at the Beginning level on the TELPAS Composite were ever reclassified as English proficient in the district.
- Students reclassified as English proficient graduated at a rate of 81%, but only one third of sixth grade newcomers were reclassified.

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