

Ninth Grade Newcomers in the Fort Worth Independent School District

Comparisons to Other English Language Learners

May 2015

Haiwen Chu
Anthony B. Fong

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

Steering Committee

Aída Walqui, Director

Teacher Professional Development Program, WestEd

Michael Sorum

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

Mariagrazia Sheffield

Assistant Superintendent of Special Populations, Fort Worth Independent School District

Suann Claunch

Director K-12 ESL, Fort Worth Independent School District

How to cite this report

Chu, H., & Fong, T. (2015). *Ninth grade newcomers in Fort Worth Independent School District: Comparisons to other English language learners*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

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.

Executive Summary

This report is part of a long-term collaboration of the Quality Teaching for English Learners initiative at WestEd with the Fort Worth Independent School District. The focus of this report is on comparisons between ninth grade newcomers and other groups of English language learners (ELLs). We compare newcomers to 1) long-term ELLs who were classified in the elementary grades, 2) "recent" ELLs who were classified as ELLs during middle school and coded as immigrants in the ninth grade, 3) "recent" ELLs classified during middle school who were not immigrants. We focus on initial English language proficiency, reclassification, and graduation outcomes, three areas of interest identified by an earlier descriptive report.

Key Findings

- Demographically, ninth grade newcomers are more linguistically diverse than long-term ELLs, who are predominantly speakers of Spanish (95%) and born in the United States (59%).
- Students who were immigrants and arrived in the middle school years came from a wide variety of countries, but were less diverse than ninth grade newcomers.
- As ninth graders, different subgroups of ELLs were concentrated at different high schools. Two high schools (Eastern Hills and South Hills), however, were in the top three in terms of enrollments for long-term ELLs and both immigrant and non-immigrant recent ELLs.
- Ninth grade newcomers at INA had lower English language proficiency compared to other ELLs, who were similar to each other in English language proficiency measured in the ninth grade year.
- Among long-term ELLs in the ninth grade, there were somewhat more students who were Advanced (47%) than Advanced High (41%) in English language proficiency.
- Nearly half of long-term ELLs (48%) were reclassified as English proficient. Approximately one third (32%) of recent ELLs were reclassified as English proficient during high school. For all three subgroups, the modal year of reclassification was eleventh grade. Reclassification was associated with graduation, with the graduation rate among reclassified ELLs exceeding 80%.
- Although the year after ninth grade had the greatest attrition for all three subgroups, among immigrant recent ELLs this rate was lower (17%) than for other groups (ranging from 22% to 32%).
- In terms of graduation rates, immigrant recent ELLs (64%) and long-term ELLs (61%) had higher rates than non-immigrant recent ELLs (49%) and ninth grade newcomers (47%).
- Differences within subgroups took varied patterns in terms of gender and lunch status. Students born in Mexico graduated at a slightly higher rate than students born in the United States.
- In terms of graduation, ELLs who immigrated in the middle school grades and who were enrolled in the ninth grade performed most similarly to long-term ELLs. These results point at the enduring challenge of achieving high school graduation within four years for ninth grade newcomers.

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

Project ELOTE, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences¹, is a Researcher-Practitioner Partnership. Researchers from WestEd are partnering with practitioners in the Fort Worth Independent School District (FWISD) to investigate academic outcomes and trajectories of secondary immigrant newcomers. This report is part of Phase One, a longitudinal analysis of extant administrative data from FWISD. The results from Phase One will enable the identification of schools sites for Phase Two, which consists of case studies of promising programs and practices. These two phases will directly inform policy and practice within the district.

English Language Learners in Texas and Fort Worth

English language learners (ELLs) constitute a large and growing population within the United States, Texas, and Fort Worth. Nationally, during the 2011-2012 school year, 4.4 million students were ELLs, or 9.1 percent of the total K-12 public school population (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 FWISD, the ELL population has grown from 21,300 in 2003-2004 to 25,800 in 2013-2014. This increase in total number of ELLs corresponds to an increase from 26.6% to 30.6% of the FWISD population.

At the national, state, and district levels most ELLs are concentrated in the elementary grades and most of them have been born in the United States. Within the secondary ELL population, however, immigrant newcomers constitute a large subgroup. In FWISD, about two fifths of ninth grade ELLs are new immigrants, and about 15% of ninth grade ELLs immigrated during the middle school years.

All secondary immigrant newcomer students in FWISD attend the International Newcomer Academy (INA) for one year. At INA, students attend content-area classes taught by teachers who work in interdisciplinary teams which each share a group of students. After that initial year at INA, students enroll in Language Center programs hosted at four middle schools and seven high school sites for one or two years. These Language Centers provide sheltered support in content-area classes for academic and English language development. As students make progress in English proficiency, 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 include 1) mainstream classes with various models of ESL support, 2) small programs hosted at comprehensive high schools, 3) two-year programs for newcomers, and 4) four-year newcomer high schools.

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.

Ninth Grade Newcomers and Other English Language Learners

This report focuses on a cohort of 680 ninth graders in the 2009-2010 school year who were classified as ELLs. A previous report detailed the outcomes and trajectories of ninth grade newcomer students who were enrolled at INA in the 2009-2010 school year (Chu & Fong, 2015). Newcomers are linguistically and ethnically diverse, and those who stay make progress in English language proficiency, but few are reclassified as English proficient, and graduation rate is 47% after four years.

This report compares those newcomers to three other subgroups of ELLs. The first subgroup consists of 241 ninth grade ELLs who were first classified as ELLs in the fifth grade or earlier. In this report, we will refer to this subgroup as "long term"². The other two subgroups of ELLs were all classified in the middle school grades (6-8) and we refer to both subgroups as "recent" ELLs. Among recent ELLs, some students were immigrants ("immigrant recent ELLs"), while others were not immigrants ("non-immigrant recent ELLs.") In the sample, 89 recent ELLs were immigrants, while 90 recent ELLs were not immigrants. This "immigrant" variable is based upon the federal definition which identifies all students not born in the United States and who have had less than three full years of schooling in the United States.

Subgroups of ELLs in this Report

Newcomers enrolled in FWISD as ninth grade immigrants and attended the International Newcomer Academy.

Long-term ELLs were classified as ELLs in elementary grades (kindergarten through fifth).

Immigrant Recent -ELLs were classified as ELLs in middle school (grades 6 through 8) and were identified as immigrants³

Non-Immigrant Recent ELLs were classified as ELLs in middle school (grades 6 through 8) and were not identified as immigrants.

These comparisons of ninth grader newcomers to other ELLs are important because most research studies focus on ELLs in the elementary or early secondary grades. ELLs at the high school level may have very different needs. This study builds upon the categories developed by a study of ninth grade ELLs in Chicago Public Schools (Gwynne, et al., 2012). Although a statewide study in Massachusetts did compare the English language proficiency growth of ninth grade ELLs (Slama, 2011), that study only compared foreign-born to U.S.-born ELLs and did not consider age at immigration for foreign-born students. This study provides

² The use of this term in this report differs from uses in other contexts, in which six years as an ELL is the standard definition (Olsen, 2010).

³ In the state of Texas, "immigrant" is defined as a student who has not attended U. S. schools for three full academic school years.

initial information about potential differences between newcomers and other subgroups of ELLs which may be consequential for policy, programs, and practices.

Research Questions

This report addresses the following research questions:

- I. What are demographic characteristics of ninth grade ELLs?
- II. What campuses do high school ELLs attend?
- III. How do subgroups of ninth grade ELLs compare on TELPAS Composite ratings?
- IV. How do subgroups of ninth grade ELLs compare in terms of reclassification?
- V. How do subgroups of ninth grade ELLs compare in terms of graduation?

I. What are demographic characteristics of ninth grade ELLs?

Ninth grade newcomers at INA were ethnically and linguistically diverse; approximately half of the 2009-2010 cohort was Latino (Table 1). By contrast, long-term ninth grade ELLs were nearly all Latino (95%), most of whom (59%) were born in the United States (Table 2).

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Ninth Graders at INA in 2009-2010

Gender		Ethnicity		Country of Origin		Home Language		Lunch Status	
Female	125 45%	Asian	87 32%	Mexico	97 36%	Spanish	137 50%	Ineligible	70 25%
Male	150 55%	Black	25 9%	Burma	47 17%	Arabic	21 8%	Free	200 73%
	275	Latino	138 50%	Bhutan	30 11%	Burmese	27 10%	Reduced	5 2%
		White	25 9%	U. S.	23 8%	Vietnamese	8 3%		275
			275	Iraq	20 7%	Farsi	2 1%		
				Somalia	13 5%	Nepali	32 12%		
				Burundi	9 3%	Somali	13 5%		
				Vietnam	7 3%	Tigrinya	1 0%		
				El Salvador	6 2%	Other	34 12%		
				Cuba	3 1%		275		
				Honduras	3 1%				
				Other	14 5%				
					272				
				Missing	3				

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of Long Term Ninth Grade ELLs in 2009-2010

Gender		Ethnicity		Country of Origin		Home Language		Lunch Status	
Female	83 36%	Asian	2 1%	Mexico	91 38%	Spanish	232 96%	Ineligible	46 19%
Male	146 64%	Black	7 3%	USA	138 58%	Lao	1 0%	Free	182 76%
	229	Latino	217 95%	Liberia	2 1%	Krio	1 0%	Reduced	13 5%
Missing	12	White	3 1%	Somalia	5 2%	Vietnamese	1 0%		241
			229	El Salvador	1 0%	Somali	4 2%		
		Missing	12	Guatemala	1 0%	Other	2 1%		
				Honduras	2 1%		241		
					240				
				Missing	1				

Among ninth graders, long-term ELLs were similar to non-immigrant recent ELLs, 90% of whom were Latino (Table 3). Latino non-immigrant recent ELLs were more likely, however, to have been born in Mexico (60%) than the United States (40%).

Table 3
Demographic Characteristics of Ninth Grade Non-Immigrant Recent ELLs in 2009-2010

Gender		Ethnicity		Country of Origin		Home Language		Lunch Status	
Female	41 51%	Asian	1 1%	Mexico	47 52%	Spanish	80 89%	Not eligible	17 19%
Male	40 49%	Black	7 9%	USA	31 34%	Somali	5 6%	Free	71 79%
	81	Latino	73 90%	Somalia	5 6%	Arabic	1 1%	Reduced	2 2%
Missing	9	White	0 0%	Other	7 8%	Croatian	1 1%		90
			81		90	Krio	1 1%		
		Missing	9			Vietnamese	1 1%		
						Other	1 1%		
							90		

Similar to their ninth grade counterparts at INA (Table 1), only about two thirds of immigrant recent ELLs were Latino (Table 4). Immigrant students who arrived in the middle school grades spoke a wide variety of languages, including single students who spoke Kosovo, Amharic, Assyrian, Mandarin, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Swahili, and Korean.

Table 4
Demographic Characteristics of Ninth Grade Immigrant Recent ELLs in 2009-2010

Gender		Ethnicity		Country of Origin		Home Language		Lunch Status	
Female	37 44%	Asian	15 18%	Mexico	50 56%	Spanish	57 64%	Ineligible	19 21%
Male	48 56%	Black	7 8%	Burma	6 7%	Nepali	7 8%	Free	63 71%
	85	Latino	58 68%	Iraq	4 4%	Burmese	5 6%	Reduced	7 8%
Missing	4	White	5 6%	Burundi	4 4%	Arabic	3 3%		89
			85	Bhutan	7 8%	Vietnamese	2 2%		
		Missing	4	Congo	2 2%	Other	15 17%		
				El Salvador	2 2%		89		
				Vietnam	2 2%				
				Honduras	4 4%				
				Other	8 9%				
					89				

In terms of gender, there were more male students among long-term ELLs (64%) and immigrant recent ELLs (56%), while among non-immigrant recent ELLs there were about as many male students (49%) as female students (51%).

II. What campuses do high school ELLs attend?

In the 2009-2010 school year, all 275 ninth grade newcomers were enrolled at the INA. Subgroups of other ninth grade ELLs were concentrated at different campuses. About one fifth of all long-term ninth grade ELLs were enrolled at North Side High School (Table 5). North Side, however, enrolled less than 5% of all immigrant recent ELLs.⁴ Polytechnic High School enrolled 22% of immigrant recent ELLs. Eastern Hills and South Hills were in the top three high schools for all three subgroups, each accounting for at least 10% of each subgroup (Table 5).

Table 5
Concentration of Ninth Grade ELLs by Campus in the 2009-2010 School Year

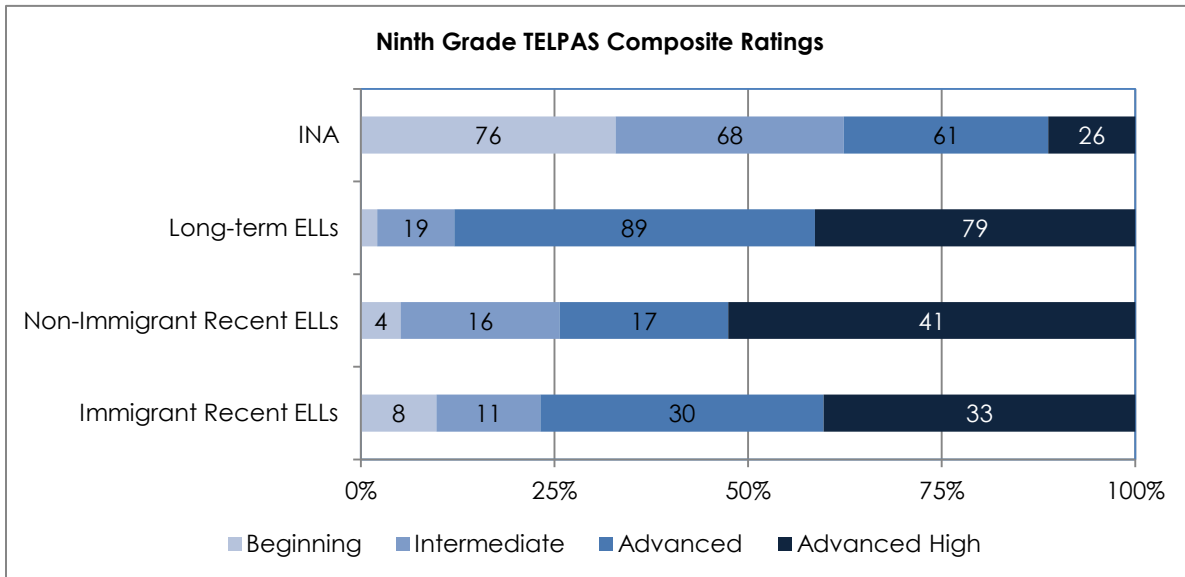
Long-Term ELLs		Non-Immigrant Recent ELLs		Immigrant Recent ELLs	
Campus	Roster	Campus	Roster	Campus	Roster
North Side	46	Eastern Hills	17	Polytechnic	20
Eastern Hills	30	South Hills	11	South Hills	16
South Hills	28	Polytechnic	10	Eastern Hills	9
Diamond Hill-Jarvis	22	OD Wyatt	10	Carter-Riverside	8
OD Wyatt	22	North Side	8	Diamond Hill-Jarvis	7
Polytechnic	21	Carter-Riverside	6	Success	7
Paschal	17	Arlington Heights	6	Arlington Heights	6
Western Hills	16	Diamond Hill-Jarvis	6	Paschal	5
		Western Hills	6		

⁴ Campuses shown in this table enrolled at least 5% of each subgroup. Complete enrollments by campus for each of these subgroups across four school years is included in the Appendix as Tables A1, A2, and A3.

II. How do subgroups of ninth grade ELLs compare on English proficiency?

This report uses the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) Composite rating to compare ninth grade English proficiency levels for INA students and three other subgroups of ELLs. Ninth grade newcomers were much more likely to be Beginning (33%) or Intermediate (29%) than other ninth grade ELLs, of whom a combined average of 18% were either Beginning or Intermediate (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Ninth Grade TELPAS Composite Ratings by ELL Subgroup



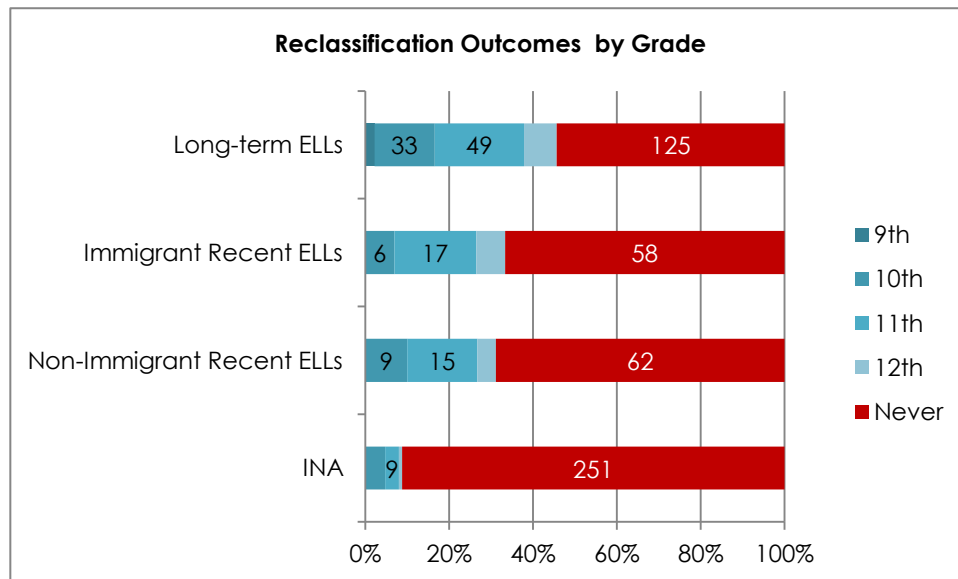
Long-term ELLs had the highest percentage of Composite ratings that were Advanced or higher (88%), but students were more likely to be Advanced (47%) than Advanced High (41%). This distribution of ratings is the reverse of recent ELLs who were more likely to be Advanced High (47%) than Advanced (29%). This higher percentage at higher levels of English language proficiency was the case for both subgroups of recent ELLs. The discrepant distribution for long-term ELLs may be an indication that students are not making progress in terms of TELPAS scores as expected. Further analysis of the longitudinal English language proficiency growth of long-term ELLs may be appropriate in better pinpointing how to accelerate their progress.

IV. How do subgroups of ninth grade ELLs compare in terms of reclassification outcomes?

A previous study found that over 90% of ninth graders at INA in the 2009-2010 were never reclassified as English proficient in FWISD (Chu & Fong, 2015). By comparison, other ninth grade ELLs are more frequently reclassified as English proficient, with long-term ELLs reclassified during high school at a higher rate (48%) than both subgroups of recent ELLs (approximately 32%). Likely because reclassification during this historical period was tied to a state standardized test in English/Language Arts that was an exit-level exam, the modal grade for reclassification for each subgroup is the eleventh grade. Observed pass rates on that eleventh grade exit-level exam were among the highest of any of the grade level tests across all student subgroups.

As was the case with ninth graders at INA, reclassified students had high graduation rates, ranging from 82% for non-immigrant recent ELLs to 95% for long-term ELLs.

Figure 2
Reclassification Outcomes of ELL Subgroups by Grade



V. How do subgroups of ninth grade ELLs compare in terms of graduation outcomes?

Graduation rates clustered around two points for the four ELL subgroups in this study. Immigrant recent ELLs had a slightly higher graduation rate (64%) than long-term ELLs (61%). Non-immigrant recent ELLs had a slightly higher graduation rate (49%) than ninth grade newcomers at INA (47%).

Students most frequently leave the district as non-graduates the year after ninth grade, but the degree of this attrition varies by subgroup. For students at INA, the rate of attrition after ninth grade was 32% (Figure 3). Among long-term ELLs, 22% of ninth graders did not return to the district in any subsequent year (Figure 4). A larger percentage (26%) of non-immigrant recent ELLs left the district after ninth grade (Figure 5). Immigrant recent ELLs had the lowest attrition (17%) after ninth grade (Figure 6).

Figure 3
Graduation Outcomes and Non-Graduate Leavers Among INA Students

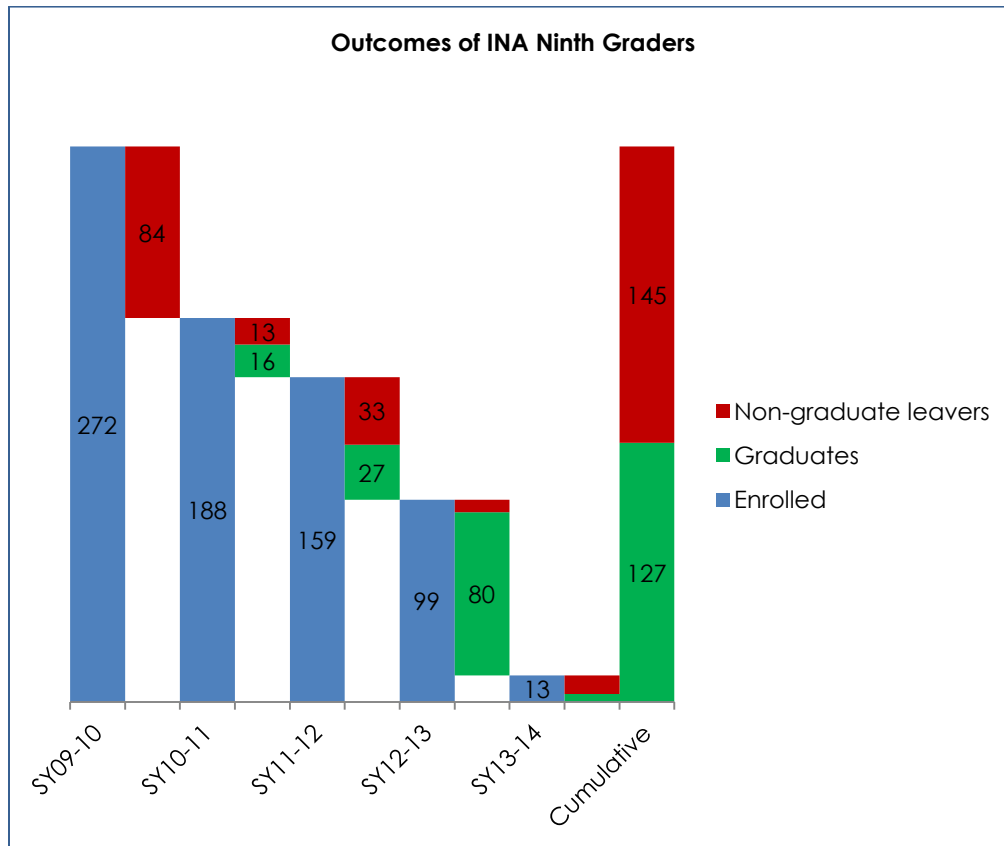


Figure 4
Graduation Outcomes and Non-Graduate Leavers Among Long-Term ELLs

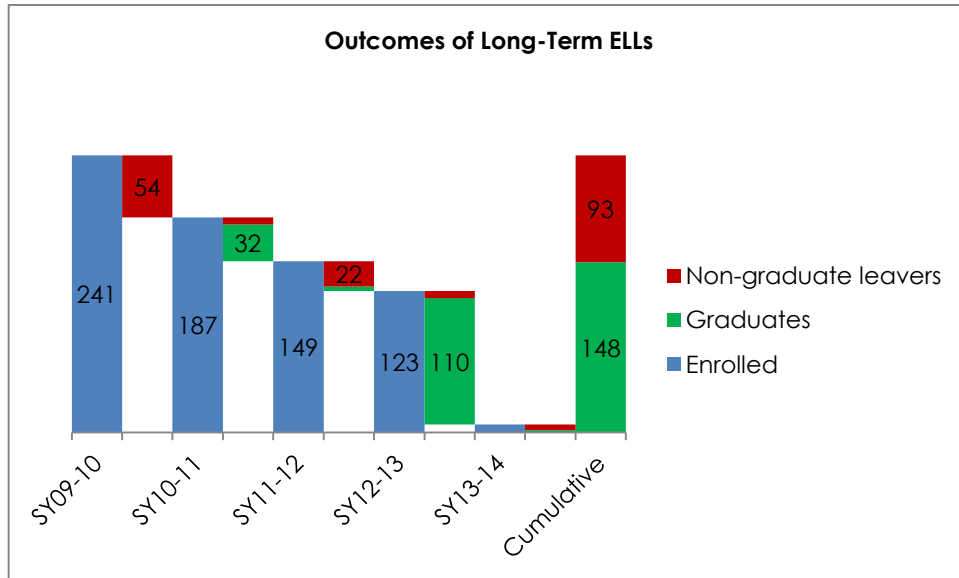


Figure 5
Graduation Outcomes and Non-Graduate Leavers Among Immigrant Recent ELLs

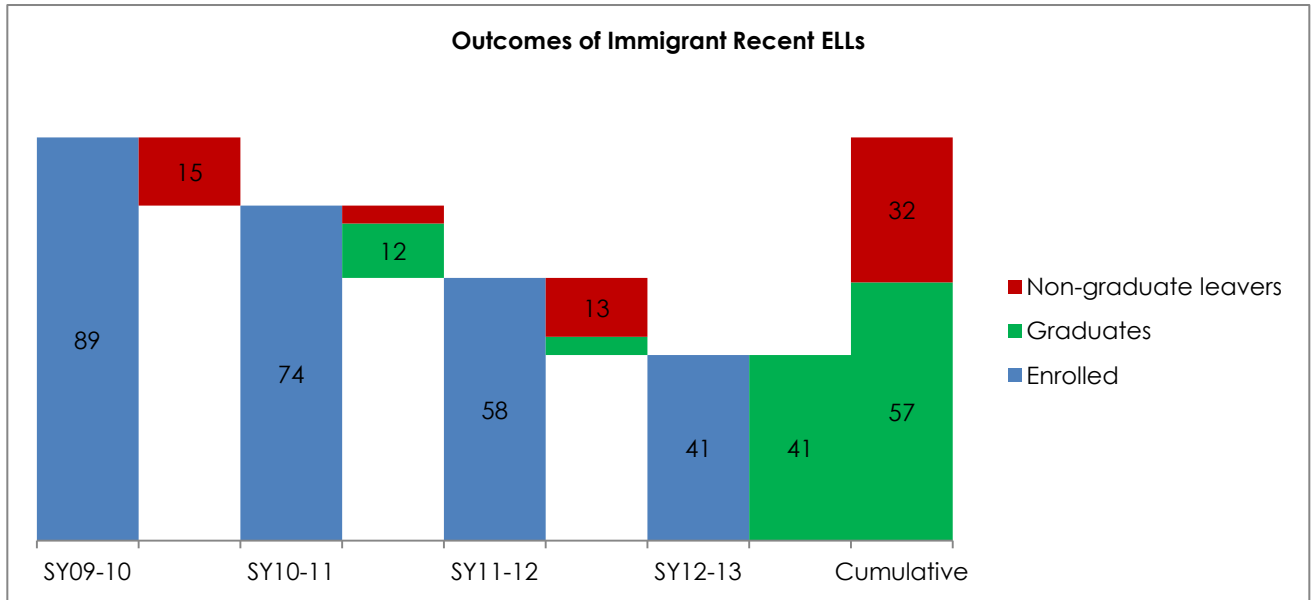
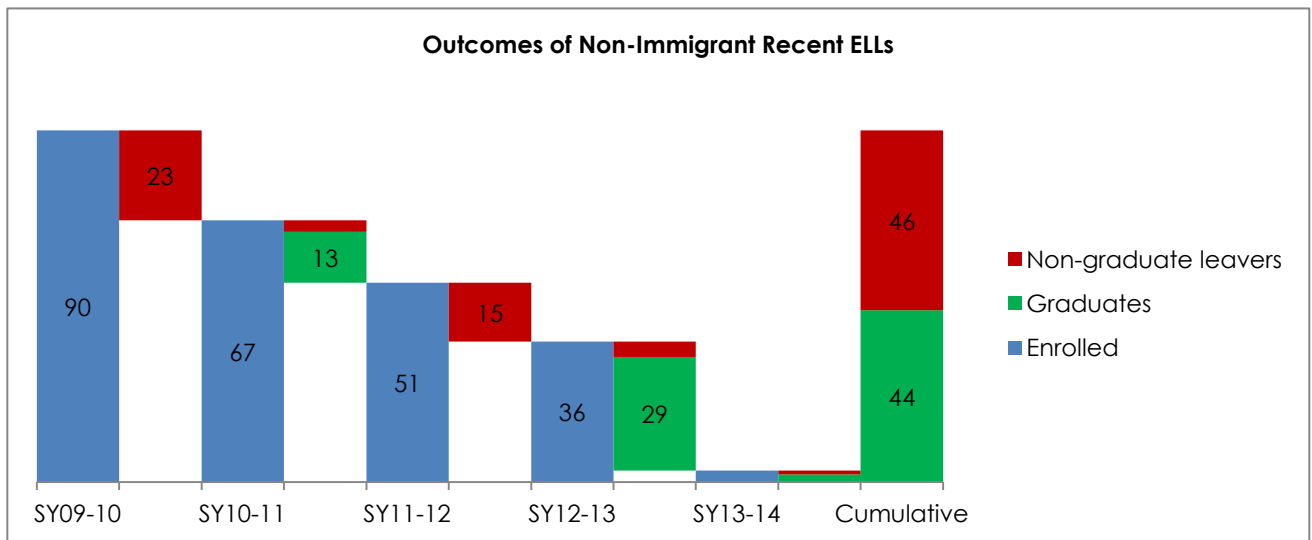


Figure 6
Graduation Outcomes and Non-Graduate Leavers Among Non-Immigrant Recent ELLs



Graduation rates across subgroups of ELLs varied substantially (Table 5). Female long-term ELLs had a somewhat higher graduation rate (66%) than male long-term ELLs (60%). Among recent ELLs, however, male students graduated at higher rates than their female counterparts. Within each subgroup of ELLs, Black students had higher graduation rates than their Asian and Latino counterparts. For non-immigrant ELLs, students born in Mexico had slightly higher graduation rates than their counterparts born in the United States (62% compared to 59% among long-term ELLs; 47% compared to 45% among recent ELLs). Among long-term ELLs, students ineligible for free or reduced lunch had a lower graduation rate (52%) than students qualifying for free or reduced lunch (63%). Among immigrant recent ELLs, reduced lunch students had a lower graduation rate (43%) than ineligible or free lunch students (64%). Graduation rates did not vary much among non-immigrant ELLs according to lunch status.

Table 5
Four Year Graduation Rates of ELL Subgroups

		Long-term ELLs (n=241)	Recent ELLs		International Newcomer Academy (n=275)
			Immigrant (n=89)	Non-Immigrant (n=90)	
Gender	Female	66%	59%	49%	46%
	Male	60%	65%	53%	47%
Ethnic Group	Asian		67%		49%
	Black	86%	71%	57%	25%
	Latino	62%	60%	49%	49%
Country of Origin	Mexico	62%	64%	47%	58%
	USA	59%		45%	35%
	Burma		50%		40%
	Iraq		75%		45%
	Burundi		100%		11%
	Bhutan		100%		60%
	Somalia			80%	15%
Home Language	Spanish	60%	60%	48%	50%
Lunch Code	Ineligible	52%	63%	47%	40%
	Free	63%	65%	49%	48%
	Reduced	62%	43%	50%	40%

Implications

This report has analyzed the heterogeneity in demographics, proficiency, and outcomes for English language learners. These differences may point at both different kinds of needs for the different subgroups as well as the need to design and implement interventions that improve summative outcomes such as graduation. These comparisons highlight the daunting challenges in ensuring that ninth grade newcomers graduate from high school.

At the beginning of their time in the district, newcomers are more ethnically and linguistically diverse than their non-immigrant counterparts. Newcomers also start out with lower levels of English language proficiency than other ELLs. In the intervening years, newcomers are reclassified as English proficient at less than half the rate of other ELLs. By the end of four years, however, non-immigrant recent ELLs end up graduating at a rate similar (49%) to newcomers (47%). More research may be needed into why this group ends up with outcomes lower than both immigrant recent ELLs and long-term ELLs.

The fact that immigrant recent ELLs were able to graduate at a rate slightly higher (64%) than long-term ELLs (61%) may suggest immigrant students need more time enrolled in the district to graduate, including four full years in a comprehensive high school. More research is necessary to understand how programs can more effectively serve newcomers and ELLs and support them towards high school graduation.

References

- Chu, H., & Fong, T. (2015). Ninth grade newcomers in the Fort Worth Independent School District: A focus on academic trajectories and outcomes (Descriptive report). San Francisco, CA: WestEd.
- Gwynne, J., Pareja, A., Ehrlich, S., & Allensworth, E. (2012). What matters for staying on-track and graduating in Chicago Public Schools: A focus on English language learners. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Collaborative on Chicago School Research.
- Slama, R. (2012). A longitudinal analysis of academic English proficiency outcomes for adolescent English language learners in the United States. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104, 265-285.

Appendix

Table A1
Distribution of Long-Term Ninth Grade ELLs across Campuses

Campus	SY09-10	SY10-11	SY11-12	SY12-13
Carter -Riverside	8	5	4	4
Arlington Heights	11	8	5	5
South Hills	28	23	20	13
Diamond Hill-Jarvis	22	19	18	15
Dunbar	2	2	3	3
Eastern Hills	30	19	12	11
North Side	46	37	29	22
Polytechnic	21	18	11	7
Paschal	17	15	13	12
Trimble Tech	0	1	1	1
Southwest	3	2	2	2
Western Hills	16	15	10	9
OD Wyatt	22	17	15	11
New Lives	1	3	3	3
Metro Opportunity	6	0	1	0
Success	4	3	2	3
Other	4	0	0	2

Table A2
Distribution of Non-Immigrant Ninth Grade Recent ELLs across Campuses

Campus	SY09-10	SY10-11	SY11-12	SY12-13
Carter -Riverside	6	6	6	6
Arlington Heights	6	3	1	0
South Hills	11	7	7	5
Diamond Hill-Jarvis	6	4	2	2
Dunbar	2	0	2	1
Eastern Hills	17	11	5	4
North Side	8	7	6	4
Polytechnic	10	9	5	2
Paschal	3	2	0	0
Trimble Tech	0	1	2	2
Southwest	3	1	2	0
Western Hills	6	7	7	4
OD Wyatt	10	6	5	4
New Lives	1	2	0	0
Metro Opportunity	0	1	0	0
Success	0	0	1	2
Other	1	0	0	0

Table A3
Distribution of Immigrant Ninth Grade Recent ELLs across Campuses

Campus	SY09-10	SY10-11	SY11-12	SY12-13
Carter -Riverside	8	6	6	4
Arlington Heights	6	6	5	4
South Hills	16	15	11	8
Diamond Hill-Jarvis	7	6	6	5
Dunbar	0	1	1	1
Eastern Hills	9	5	4	2
North Side	4	5	1	2
Polytechnic	20	16	12	5
Paschal	5	4	3	3
Trimble Tech	0	0	0	0
Southwest	3	3	3	3
Western Hills	3	1	1	1
OD Wyatt	1	0	1	2
New Lives	0	1	2	0
Metro Opportunity	0	0	0	1
Success	7	5	2	0
Other	8	6	6	4