

BILINGUAL EDUCATION

EXAMINING POLICY LEVERS FOR ENGLISH LEARNER COURSE ACCESS

Exploring bilingual education as a policy lever in Oregon

This brief explores the potential of **bilingual programs** to support access to core content courses for students classified as English Learners (ELs).

The most common types of bilingual education programs in Oregon are:

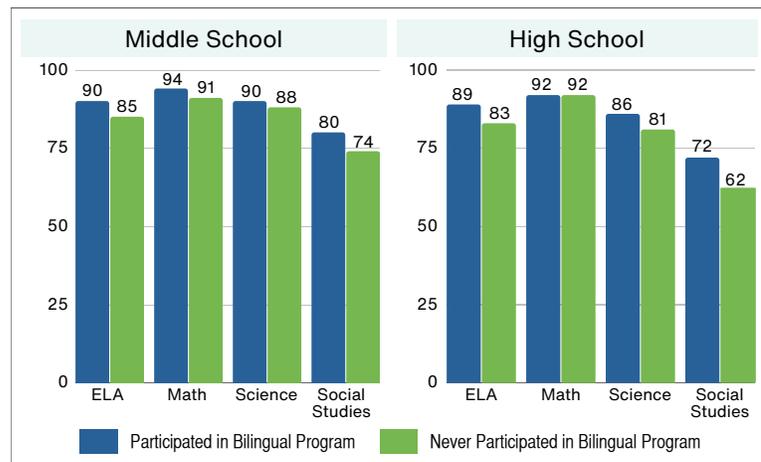
- **Dual language:** Instruction is in English and a partner language, with goals of biliteracy and bilingualism. This is also known as a two-way immersion program.
- **Transitional:** Students' home language is used as a temporary bridge, with the goal of transitioning to instruction in English.

Because definitions have changed over time, the analyses in this brief include enrollment in any type of bilingual program.

Bilingual programs are much more common in elementary school. In 2018/19, 23% of Oregon elementary students classified as ELs were enrolled in bilingual programs, compared to 6% of EL-classified students in middle and high school.

Therefore, this brief analyzes how *past participation* in bilingual education relates to core content course enrollment in middle and high school. Analyses include students whose records were traced back to kindergarten.

Percentages of EL-Classified Middle and High School Students in Oregon Enrolled in Core Content Courses, by Previous Bilingual Education Participation



Data: Oregon Department of Education, 2014/15 – 2018/19

EL-classified students who had participated in bilingual education were more likely to enroll in core content courses

Among EL-classified students in middle and high school between 2014/15 and 2018/19, we found that students who had ever participated in a bilingual program generally had higher levels of enrollment in English language arts (ELA), social studies, and science courses.

Students who had participated in bilingual programs for longer periods of time were more likely to be enrolled in core content courses than students who had participated for shorter periods of time. For example, 92 percent of EL-classified high school students who had participated in a bilingual program for 5 years or more were enrolled in a science course compared to 83 percent who had participated for fewer than 5 years.

Although causal conclusions cannot be made from these data, bilingual programs may have supported EL-classified students in building content knowledge, thus preparing them for later content courses.

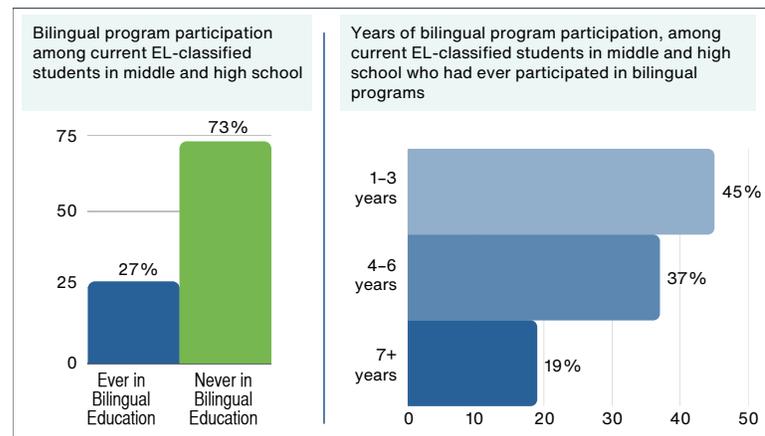
Some students had more access to bilingual education than others

Based on data for EL-classified students in grades 6–12 from 2014/15 to 2018/19:

- Spanish-speaking EL-classified students had the highest rates of past participation in bilingual education (36%), followed by Russian speakers (16%).
- Economically disadvantaged EL-classified students were two times more likely to have participated in bilingual education than their peers.
- Districts with more students who had ever been classified as ELs tended to have higher percentages of students who had ever participated in bilingual education.
- No substantial differences by gender or special education status were observed in participation rates.

More than a quarter of EL-classified students in middle and high school had participated in bilingual education, and over half of that group had participated for 4 years or more

Percentages of EL-Classified Middle and High School Students in Oregon Participating in Bilingual Programs



Data: Oregon Department of Education, 2014/15 – 2018/19

In the 2018/19 school year, 27 percent of middle and high school students currently classified as English Learners had participated in bilingual education at some point in their schooling. Among those who had ever participated in bilingual education, 45 percent had participated for 1–3 years, 37 percent had participated for 4–6 years, and 19 percent had participated for more than 7 years.

The state only collects information about bilingual participation for current EL students. Therefore, bilingual participation rates cannot be determined for former EL students or students who were never classified as ELs.

Key Takeaways

- In 2018/19, more than one in four EL-classified students at the secondary level had ever participated in bilingual education, and more than half of that group had participated for 4 years or more. Although bilingual programs are much more common at the elementary level than in middle and high school, substantial numbers of secondary EL students have been enrolled in bilingual education in the past.
- EL-classified students who are Spanish speakers, who are economically disadvantaged, and/or who are in districts with more EL-classified students are more likely to have participated in bilingual education than other students.
- Middle and high school students who had participated in bilingual education had higher enrollment rates in core content courses (ELA, science, and social studies) than their peers who had not participated in bilingual programs.