Office of English Language Acquisition

Supporting English Learners After the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

April 4, 2024

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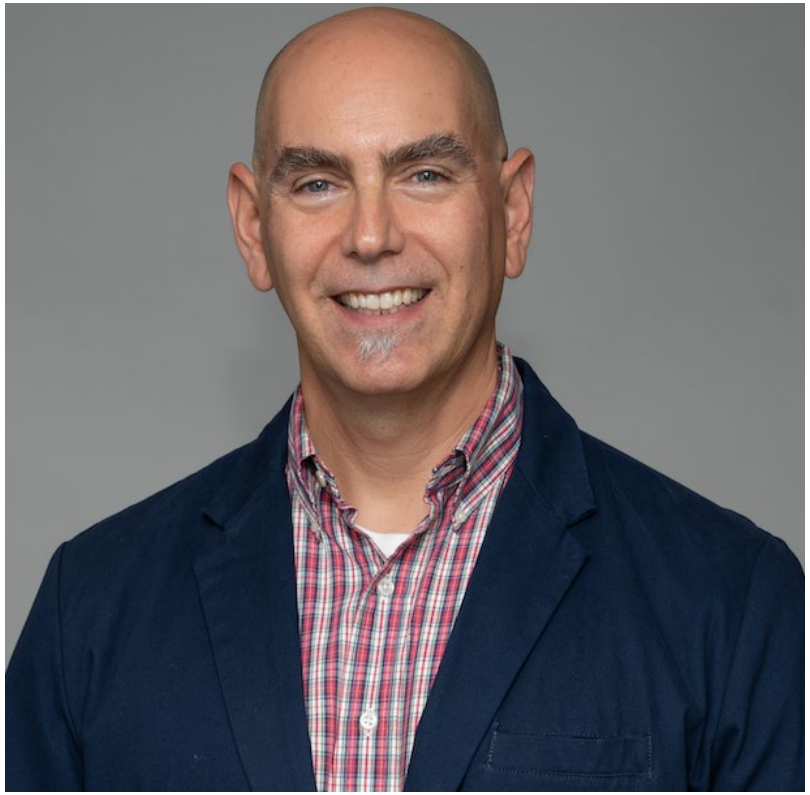

Samuel Klein
Supervisor,
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Arlington Public Schools, Virginia

Educating English Learners During the Pandemic

Amaya Garcia
New America

Topics of Interest

- EL identification, enrollment, screening, attendance, and assessment
- Remote learning: access, infrastructure, and instruction
- Teacher workforce and COVID-19 relief funding

Findings: EL Identification, Enrollment, and Attendance

- **Remote Identification and Screening Procedures Were Imperfect**
  - State and local education agencies developed provisional identification procedures.
  - Provisional identification procedures led to an inflation of the number of currently identified English learners (ELs) going into the 2021–22 school year.

- **English Learner Enrollment and Attendance Slowed**
  - States, schools, and districts adopted more flexible attendance policies during the pandemic in an attempt to deal with attendance issues.
  - Enrollment and attendance issues persist.

Findings: EL Identification, Enrollment, and Attendance

"We didn't have an assessment tool that was designed to work in a remote environment . . . students were provisionally qualified based on their home language survey information."

- State Education Agency, Director of EL and Migrant Education

"We're seeing lower attendance, and it's a range across schools, but lower than we normally would. And I think some of this is an ongoing demand on students' schedules due to work and the stress of the transition back."

- School Network, Research Director

Findings: Assessment

- **Assessment Was Disrupted Unevenly Across School Years**
  - In spring 2021, test administration was uneven within and across states, which made for a more interrupted English language proficiency (ELP) assessment compared to the first year of the pandemic.
  - The ability to test ELs was often hindered by the fact that many schools were still operating remotely, and parents were not comfortable with bringing their kids in just to test them.

- **Linguistic Growth Was Affected in Positive and Negative Ways**
  - Various interviewees said that productive skills, such as speaking and writing, were most negatively impacted by remote instruction.
  - Several interviewees noticed that what ELs might not have gained in English they gained in their home languages by virtue of spending more time at home.

Findings: Access, Infrastructure, and Instruction

"Districts really had to scramble to provide internet services."

- State Education Agency, Director of EL and Migrant Education

"Places that had a strong curricular plan pre-pandemic and committed to that plan are the places that fared better in terms of maintaining coherent and consistent learning."

– Director of National EL Collaborative

"A lot of the students were looking at the document on their phones. What looked great on an 8 ½ x 11 piece of paper condensed onto this little thing didn't work anymore. So [the teacher] had to totally redesign the graphic organizer into smaller chunks so students could actually use it on the phone, if that's what they were doing."

- School Network, Executive Director

Findings: Access, Infrastructure, and Instruction

- **Schools provided hotspots and opened learning hubs**
- **Family engagement was used to close communication gaps**
- **ELs of different ages experienced remote learning differently**
- **Remote learning inhibited language development**
- **Pre-pandemic systems and structures for ELs had a large influence on what school districts were able to offer**
- **Teachers adapted to using new tools and strategies**

Takeaways

- Most school systems shifted “back to normal.”
- Federal COVID-19 recovery funding was a “black box” to some interviewees, and there is a need for more information on how these funds were used to support EL-identified students.
- The educational experiences of ELs during the pandemic were complicated, even conflicting at times, which can make it difficult to understand opportunity gaps.
- Barriers that ELs faced before and during the pandemic will persist unless there is a fundamental shift in how these students are viewed by policymakers and other local leaders across the country.

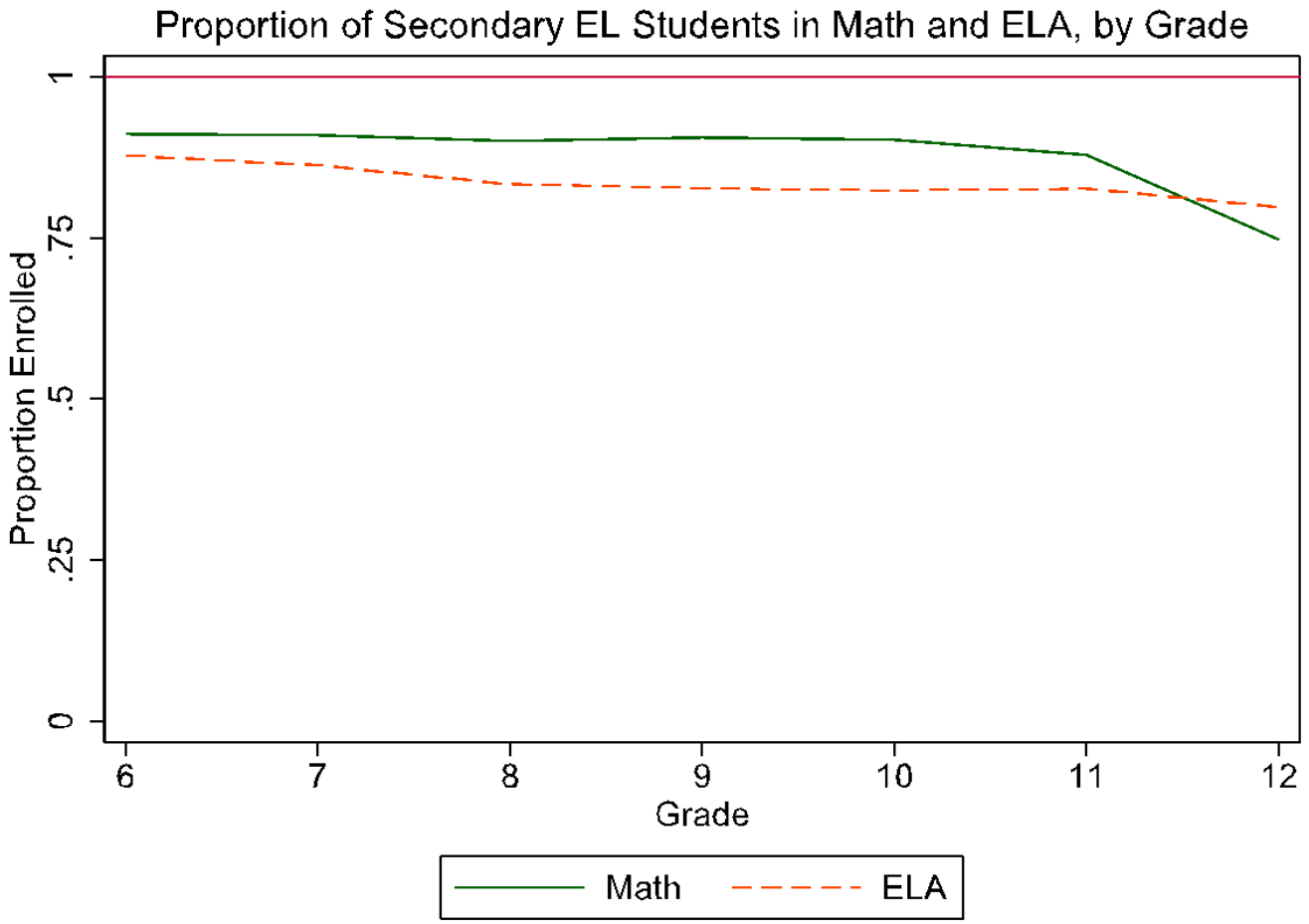
Policy Levers for Expanding Opportunities for Multilingual Students

Dr. Karen Thompson
Oregon State University

EL-Classified Students May Experience Exclusionary Tracking

In Oregon, about 1 in 10 EL-classified students in middle and high school are not enrolled in English language arts (ELA) and math.

Umansky et al., 2022



Possible Levers Related to Course Access

- Specialized teacher preparation
- Bilingual program participation

Possible Levers Related to Course Access

- Specialized teacher preparation
- Bilingual program participation
- School counselor availability
- More instructional time
- Integrated English language development
- Waiving EL services
- Peer composition

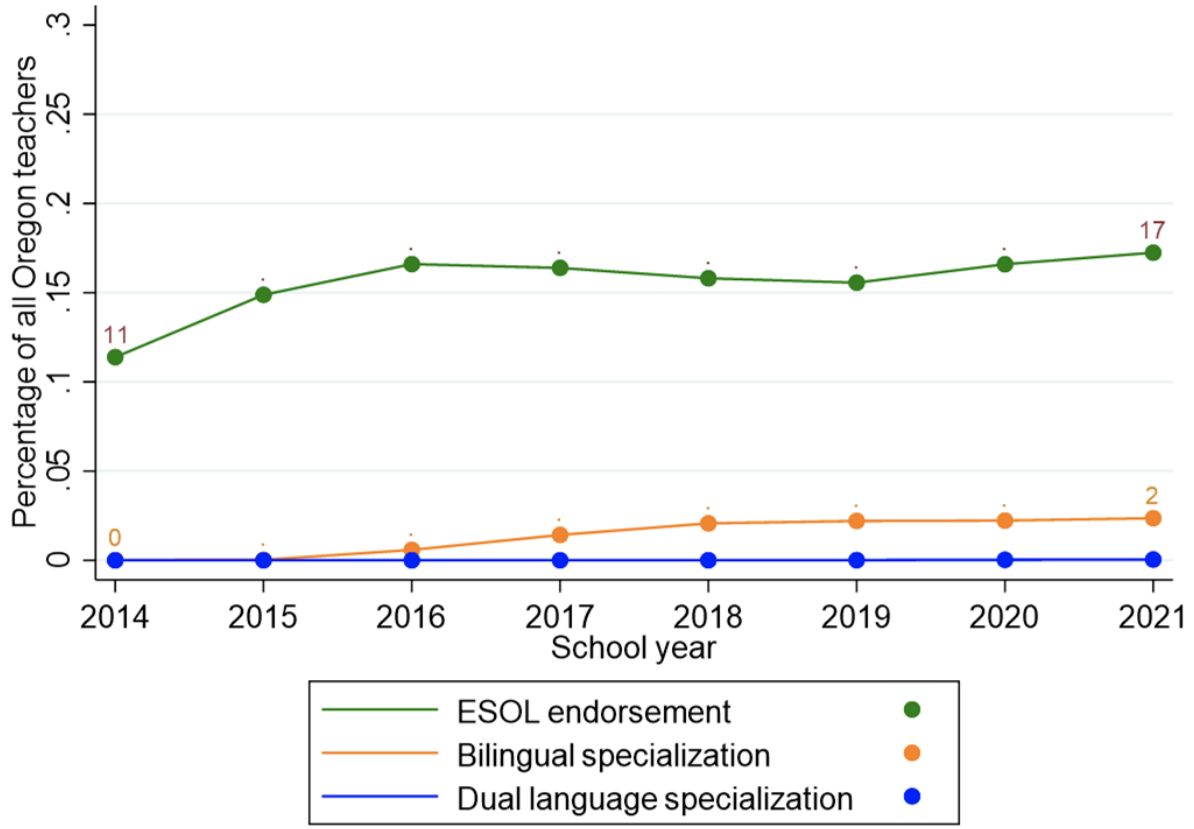
Policy Lever for Core Content Access: Specialized Teacher Preparation

Specialized EL Teacher Preparation is Becoming More Common in Oregon

There are a variety of endorsements and specializations related to working with ELs that teachers can obtain:

- ESOL endorsement
- Bilingual specialization
- Dual language specialization

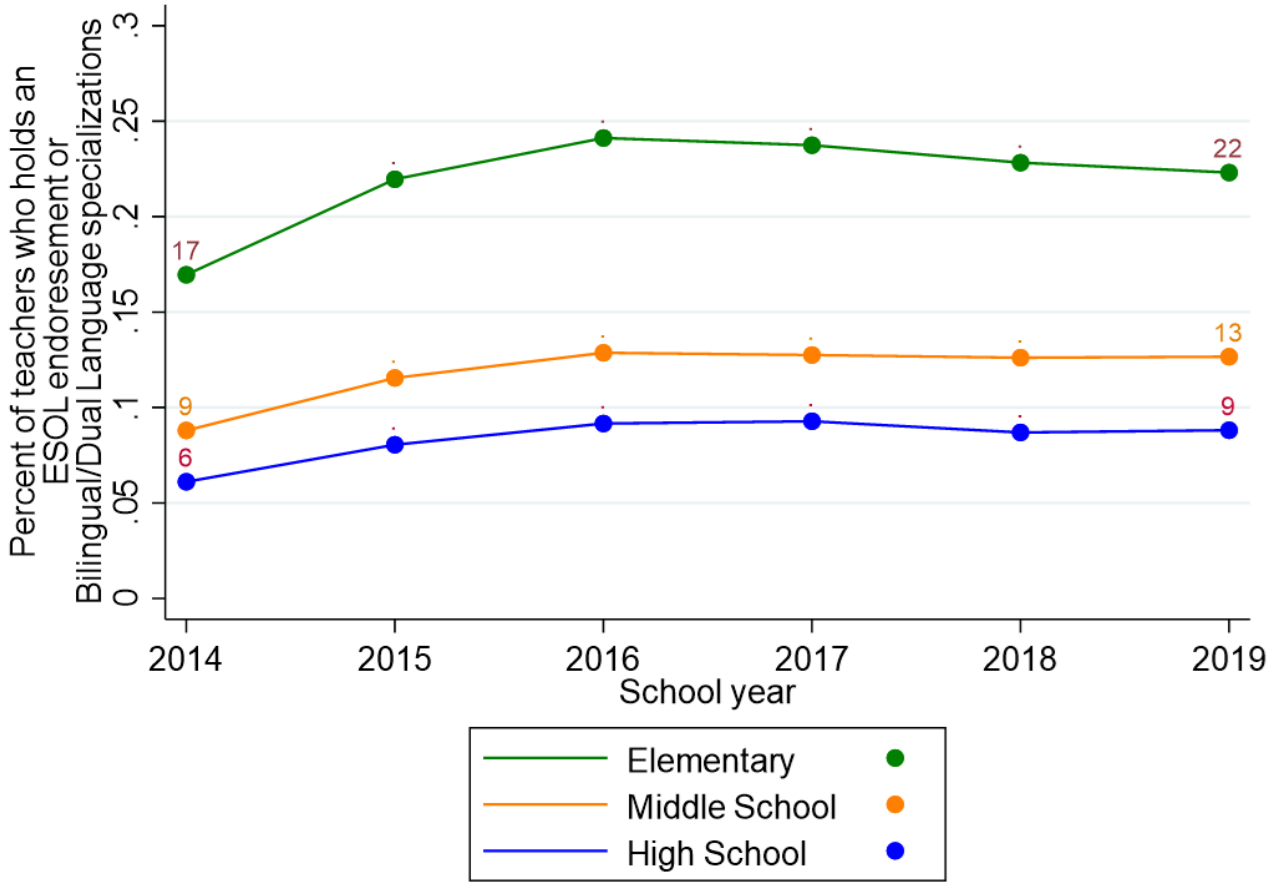
Percent of Oregon teachers who held an ESOL endorsement, bilingual specialization, or dual language specialization, over time



Authors' analysis of Oregon Department of Education data

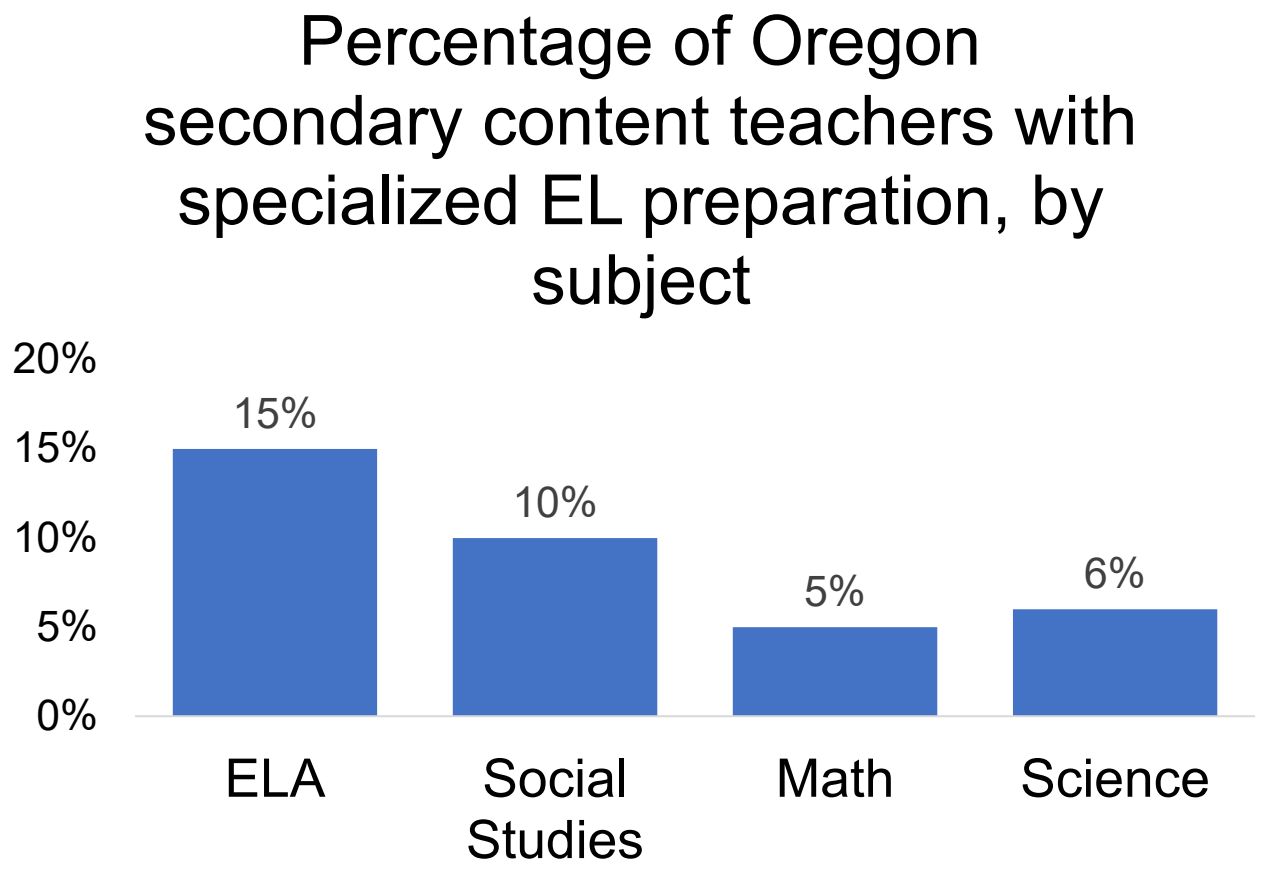
Specialized EL Teacher Preparation is Less Common in Middle and High School Than in Elementary

- In 2018–19, the percent of teachers with specialized preparation for working with ELs was:
  - 22% in elementary schools
  - 13% in middle schools
  - 9% in high schools



Authors' analysis of Oregon Department of Education data

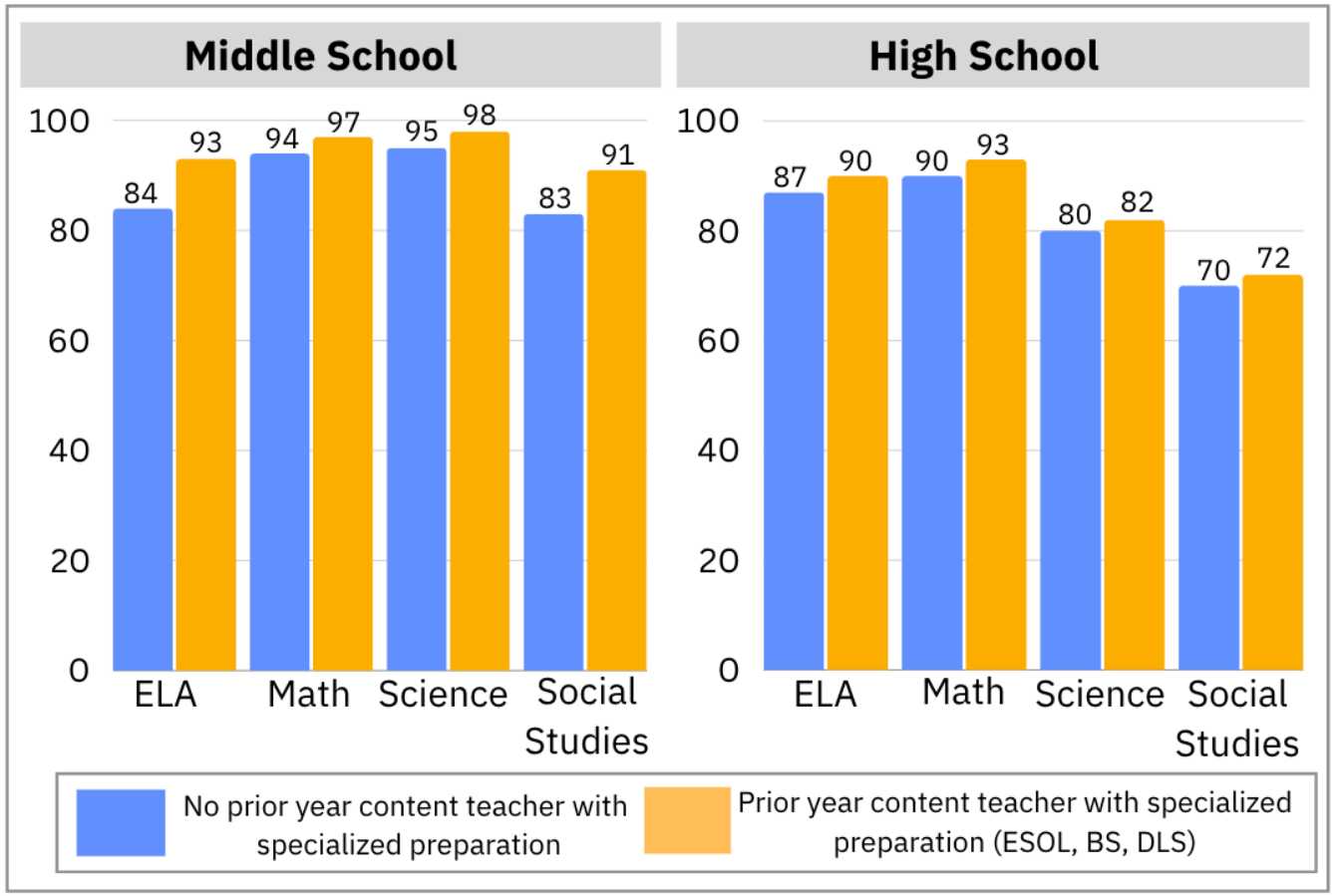
Specialized EL Teacher Preparation is Less Common in STEM Than in ELA and Social Studies



Authors' analysis of Oregon Department of Education data

Secondary EL-Classified Students With at Least One Core Content Course With a Teacher With Specialized EL Preparation Were More Likely to Enroll in Core Content Courses the Following Year

Percent of Oregon EL-Classified Students Enrolled in Core Content Courses, by School Level, Course Subject, and Access to a Content Teacher With Specialized Preparation for Working With ELs in the Prior Year

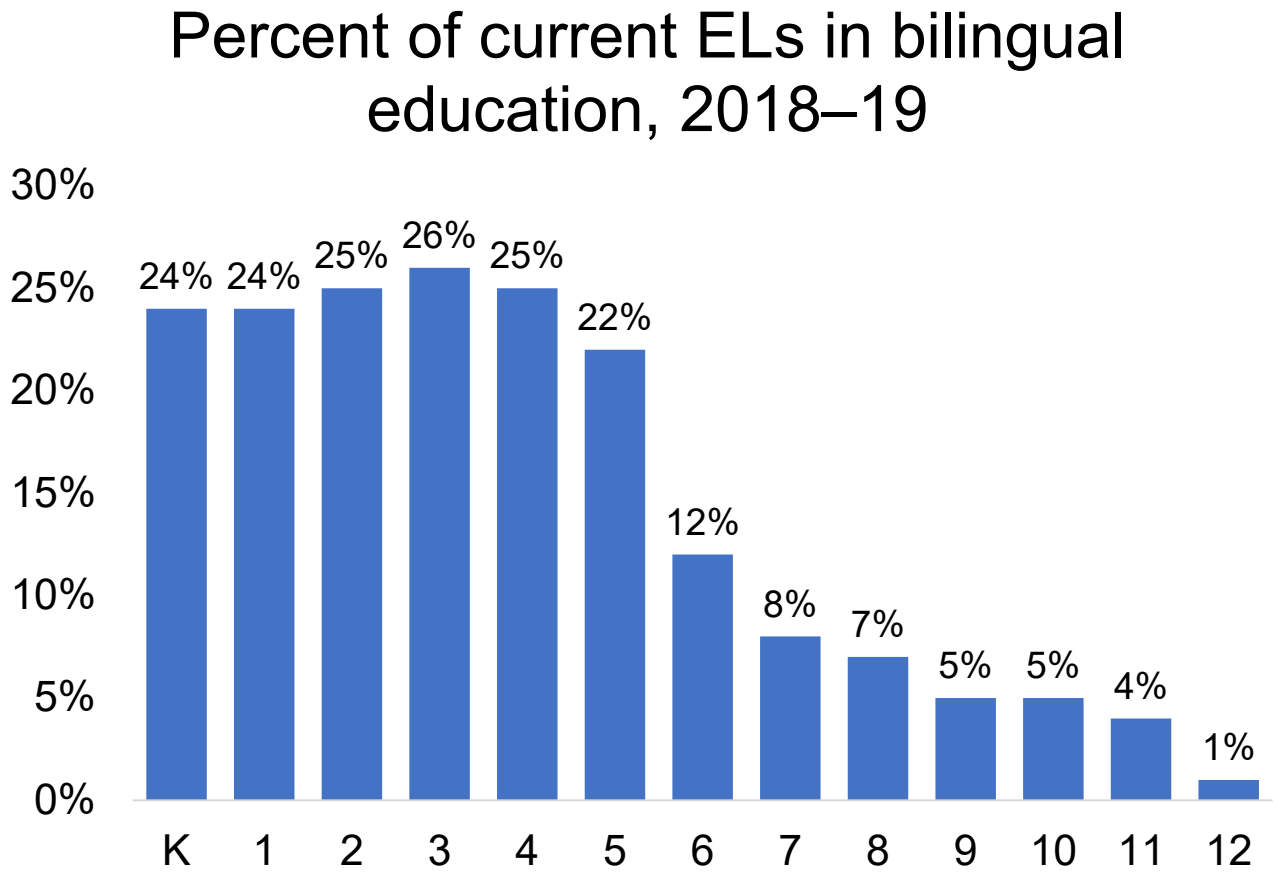


https://www.elrdcenter.wested.org/resources-policy-levers-may-support-el-enrollment

Policy Lever for Core Content Access: Bilingual Program Participation

Bilingual Programs in Oregon

- Definitions of bilingual programs in Oregon have changed over time.
- The most prevalent are:
  - dual language programs, and
  - transitional programs.
- Bilingual programs are much more common at elementary than at secondary level.

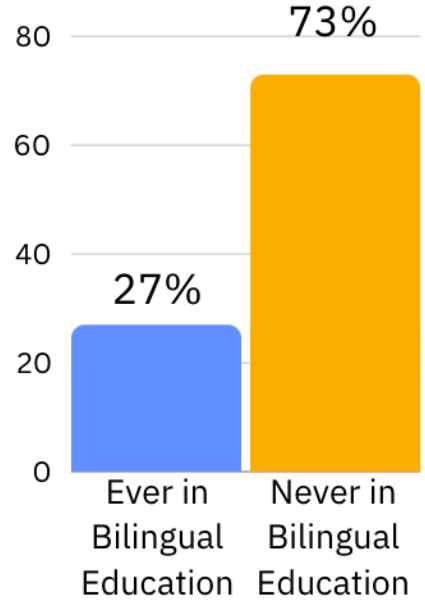


Authors' analysis of Oregon Department of Education data

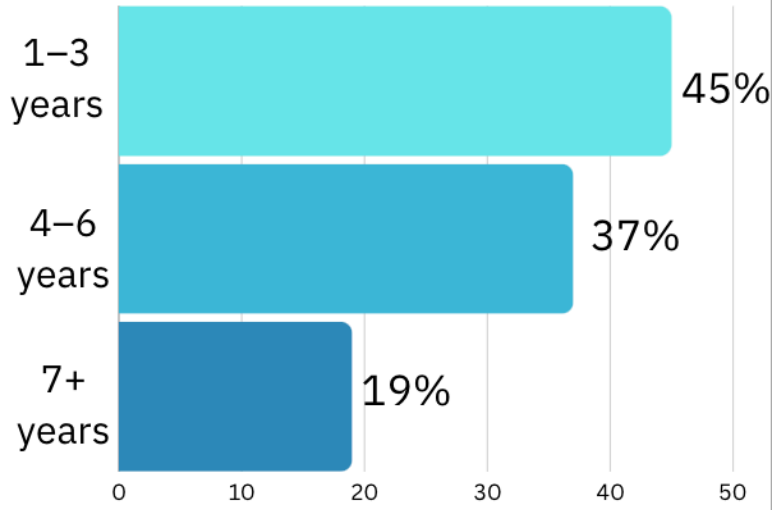
Prevalence of Bilingual Program Participation Among Secondary EL-Classified Students

- More than one-fourth of secondary EL-classified students had participated in a bilingual program at some point in their schooling.
- Among this group, over half had participated for 4 years or more.

Bilingual program participation among current EL-classified students in middle and high school



Years of bilingual program participation among current EL-classified students in middle and high school who had ever participated in bilingual programs



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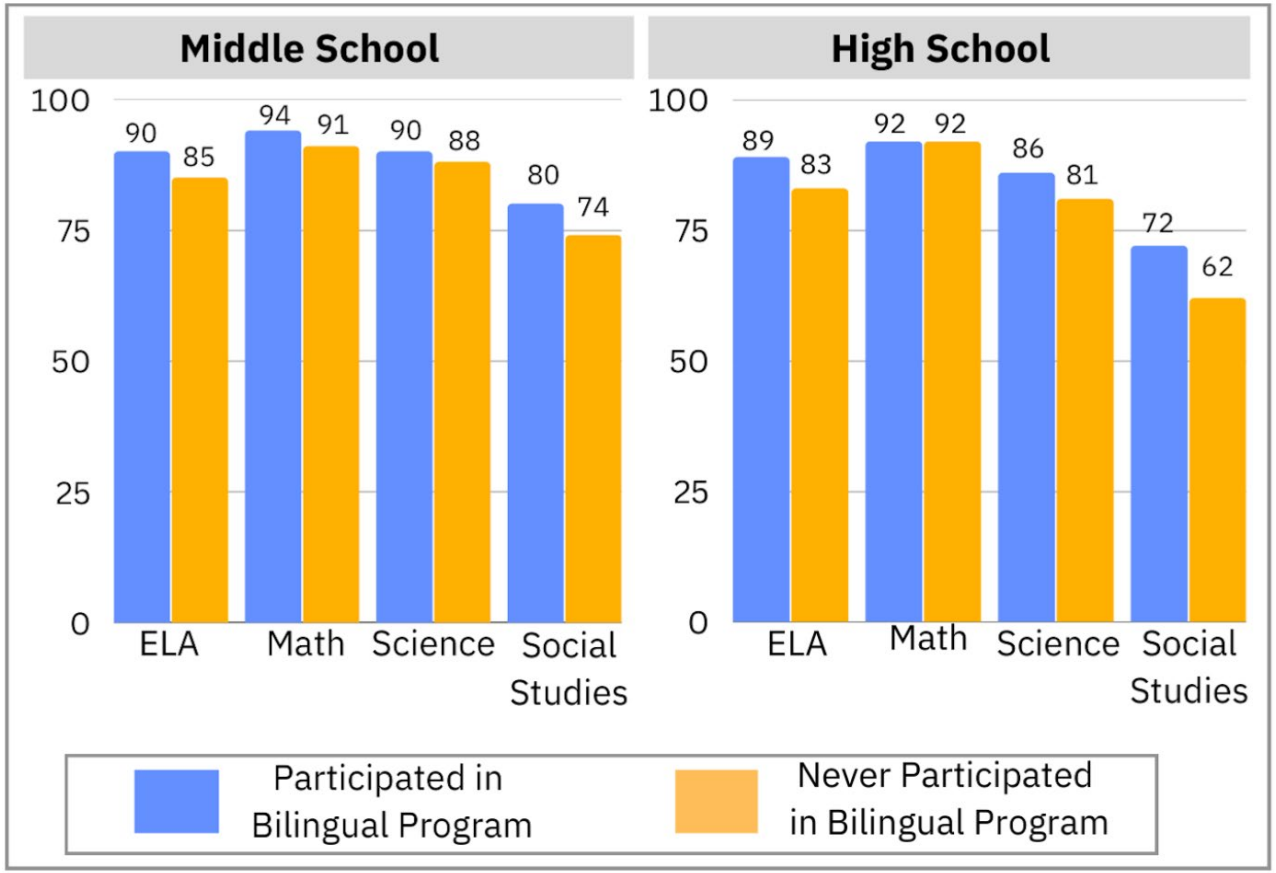
Secondary EL-Classified Students Who Had Ever Participated in a Bilingual Program Were More Likely to be Enrolled in Core Content Courses

This course enrollment advantage was even larger among students who'd been enrolled in bilingual programs for longer periods of time.

- For example, 92% of high school EL-classified students in bilingual programs for 5 years or more were enrolled in science compared to 83% who'd participated for fewer than 5 years.

Percent of Oregon Middle and High School Students Classified as ELs Who Were Enrolled in Core Content Courses, by Previous Bilingual Ed Participation



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Use of ESSER Funds to Accelerate Learning and Support ELs

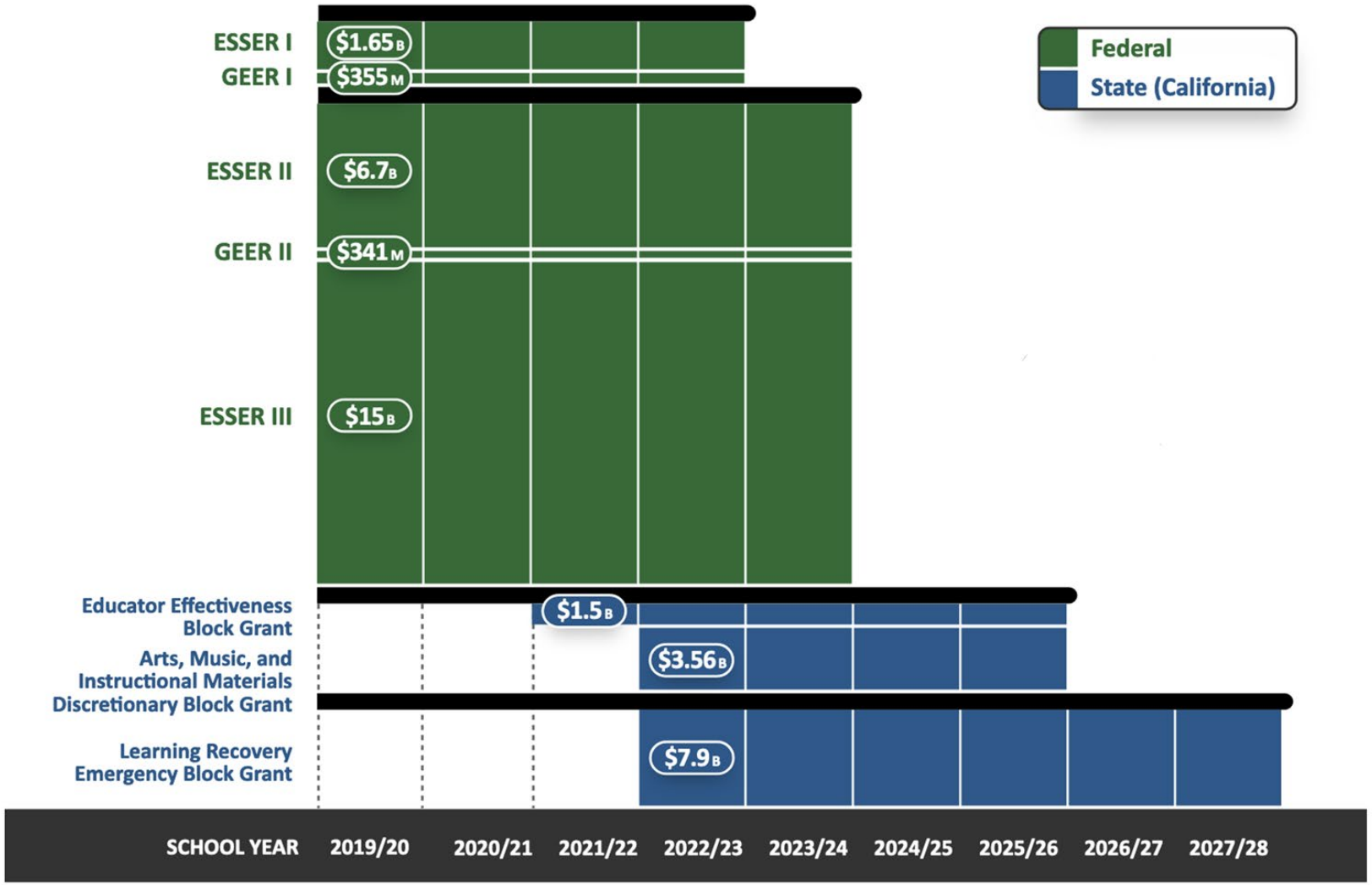
Dr. Kelsey Krausen
WestEd

An Unprecedented Investment and Opportunity

- $190 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds from three funding packages
- Over $20 billion in ESSER funding for California
- Flexibility in how funds could be used
- Data limitations present a challenge to understanding how ESSER funds were used to support ELs across the country

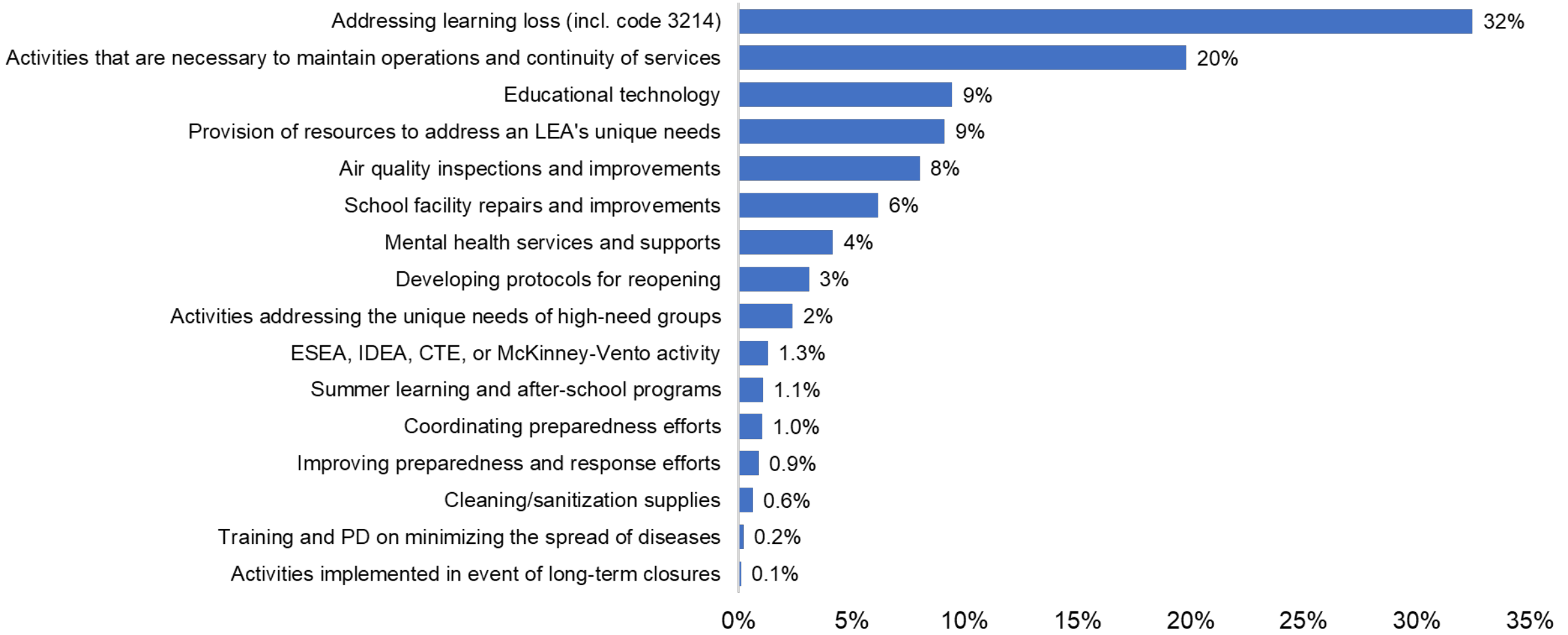
State and Federal Relief Aid Span Nearly a Decade in California

Most of the funds offered a wide range of allowable uses



Source: Authors' analysis of OESE ESSER allocations and CA grant allocations from the California Department of Education, June 2023

Most ESSER III Expenditures in California Have Been Spent on Addressing Learning Loss and Maintaining Regular Operations



Data source: https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/cr/arpact.asp (see "Quarterly Expenditure Reports")

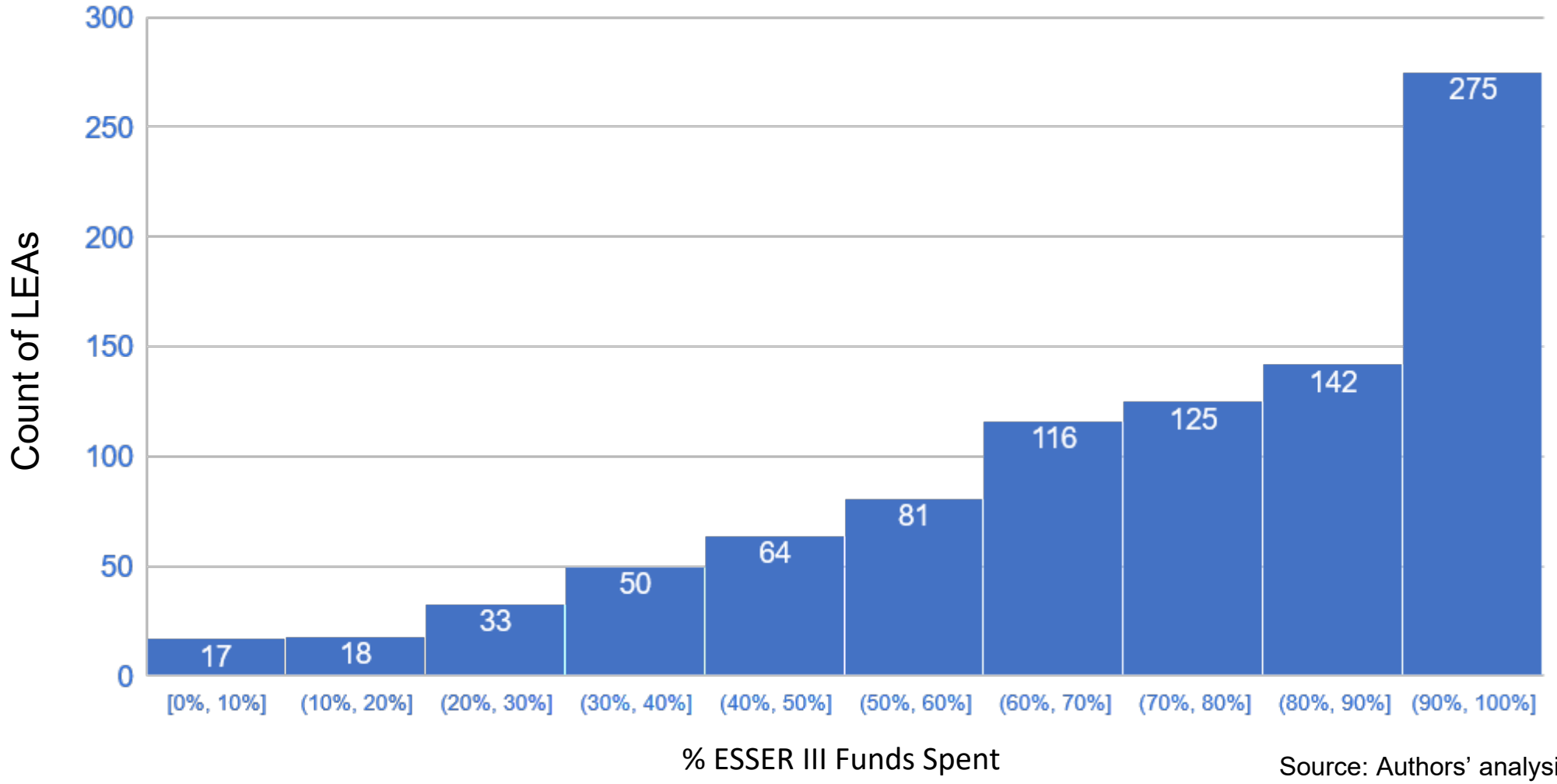
Districts With More ELs Spent Much More on School Facility Repairs and Much Less on Educational Technology Than Districts With Few ELs

- Districts with the most ELs spent nearly twice as much on school repairs as districts with the fewest ELs.
- For all districts, the largest share of total ESSER III expenditures has been spent on addressing learning loss.
  - This represents an especially large share of expenditures for the districts with the fewest ELs.

EL Decile	Average % EL	School Facility Repairs	Educational Technology	Addressing Learning Loss
1	0%	6%	5%	39%
2	3%	5%	20%	28%
3	6%	5%	17%	31%
4	9%	6%	8%	35%
5	12%	2%	9%	29%
6	16%	5%	9%	33%
7	21%	5%	8%	36%
8	26%	8%	9%	26%
9	34%	10%	8%	33%
10	53%	12%	7%	31%

Data sources: https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/cr/arpact.asp; https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/eldf.asp

Nearly 20% of Reporting Districts Have Spent Less Than Half of Their ESSER III Funds



Source: Authors' analysis of ARP Quarterly Expenditure Reports, January 2024

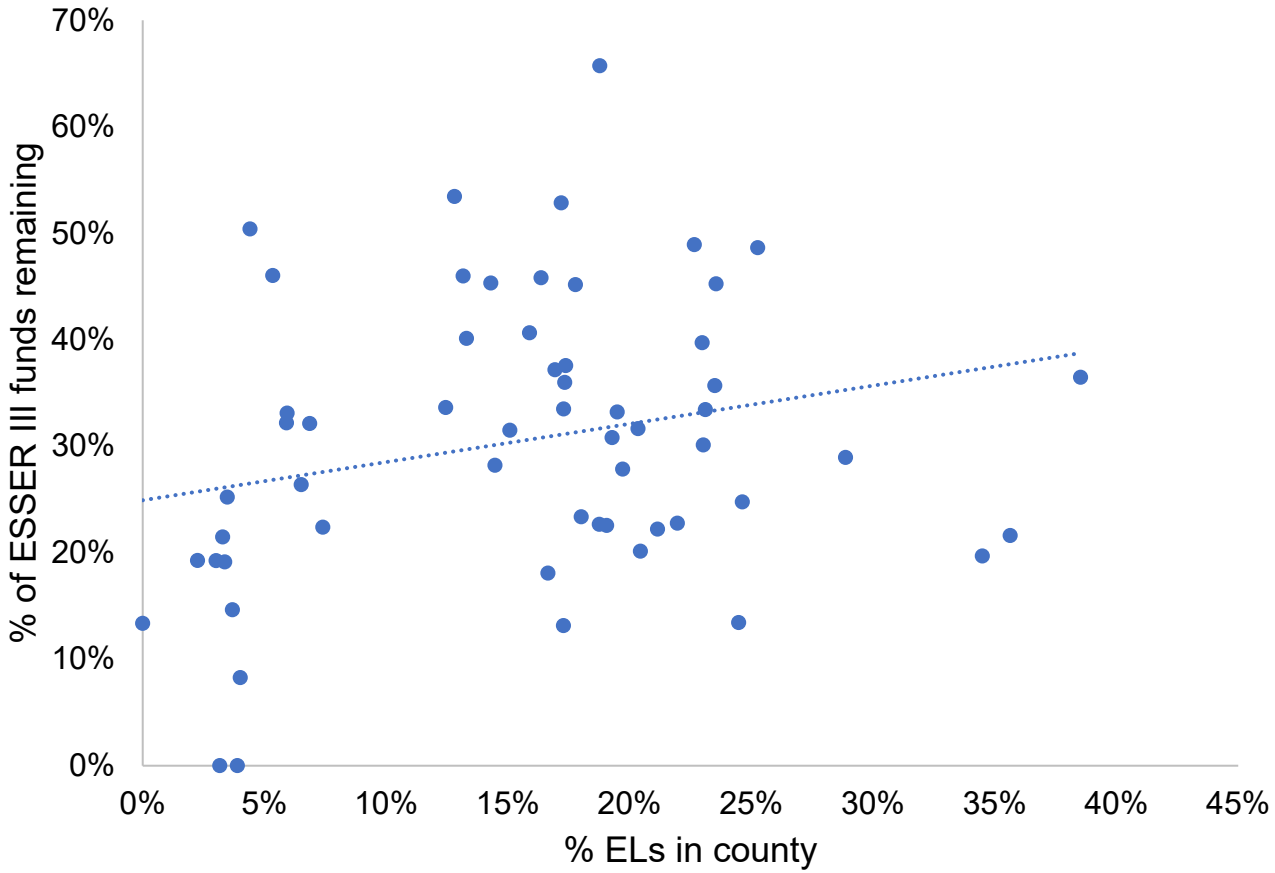
On Average, Districts With Many ELs Have the Most ESSER Funds Left to Spend

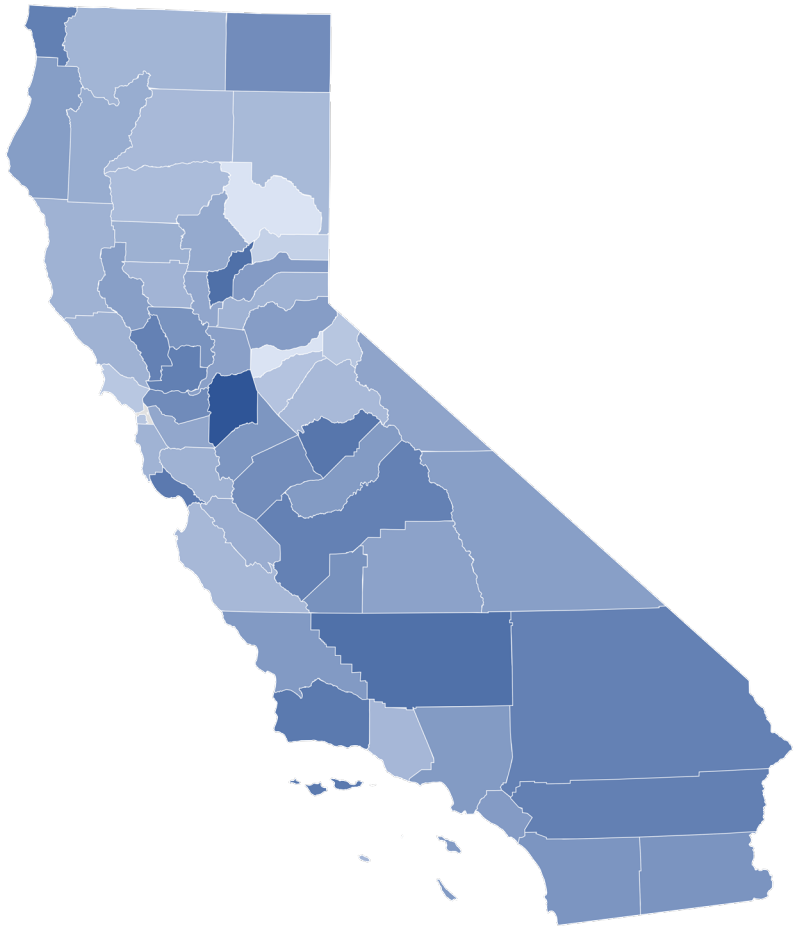
- These districts often have over one-third of their total ESSER III allocation remaining to spend.
  - ***These funds must be obligated by September and spent by January.***
- In many cases, this amounts to over $1,000 per pupil in ESSER III funds remaining.

EL Decile	Average % EL	% of ESSER III left to spend
1	0%	27%
2	3%	14%
3	6%	26%
4	9%	25%
5	12%	26%
6	16%	34%
7	21%	37%
8	26%	39%
9	34%	36%
10	53%	34%

Data sources: https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/cr/arpact.asp; https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/eldf.asp

Districts in the Central Valley and southern California have the highest share of ESSER III funds remaining





Implications

- Continued need to focus resources on students furthest from opportunity, particularly as ESSER funding ends
- Efforts to evaluate the use of funds are critical to understanding which investments were most impactful for ELs and should be sustained
- Districts will need support to develop a fiscal staircase and avoid a fiscal cliff

Leadership for English Learner Equity During Restart and Recovery

Megan Hopkins, PhD

University of California, San Diego

COVID-19: Further Fracturing a Siloed System

EL students, educators, and programs often exist in siloes separate from (or as an afterthought to) non-EL students, teachers, and the core curricula

These organizational conditions exacerbated inequities during COVID-19 as leaders made decisions about remote and hybrid instruction, assessment, family engagement, funding, etc.

Transformational, Equitable Leadership

From this…	To this…
The behaviors of a charismatic individual.	Practices that are distributed collaboratively among staff members. Interdependent relationships that involve parents, community members, and professional staff.
Efforts that manifest a deficit articulation of problems, and solutions that seek to address individual deficits.	Practices that reflect an equity lens with actions that address structural and systemic conditions, processes, and barriers that exacerbate societal inequities.

Transformational English Learner Leadership

Asset Orientation		
Robust Understanding of EL Policy and Practice	Ethos of Shared Responsibility	Regular Practice of Evidence Use

Asset Orientations

Linguistic and Cultural Deficits	Linguistic Giftedness and Cultural Assets
Individual Students and Families	Structures, Systems, and Capacity

Shifting Perspectives

- Examine data to identify and acknowledge inequities; lack of access, resources, and opportunities; and academic and linguistic outcomes
- Invoke policy and guidance to gain consensus on minimum requirements
- Leverage the evidence base to develop shared understandings of high-quality EL instruction

Shifting Perspectives

"We are breaking down the data on multilingual learners and looking at the different groups within the population to see how each is doing." - District EL Leader

"We're shadowing to experience school from English learners' eyes." - School EL Leader

"We message the expectations that we still have to make every attempt—even during these very challenging times—to meet ELs' needs . . . at a federal level, as well as a civil rights level." - State EL Leader

"We revised the language in all our guidance and 'took it on the road' to different groups to integrate it into their resources." - State EL Leader

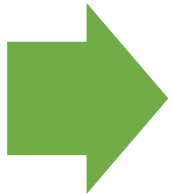
"We're developing an EL framework that will be considered across all areas of our agency's work." - State EL Leader

Leading a COVID Response

- In states and districts with well-articulated, asset-based visions for EL education, leaders were more likely to:
  - Prioritize EL students when schools returned to in-person instruction.
  - Support the rapid development or modification of resources to ensure continuity of instructional supports (e.g., lesson plan templates, model lessons for English Language Development (ELD) and content instruction).
  - Gather multiple forms of data and look across data points to make decisions.
  - Accelerate outreach to EL families and community organizations.

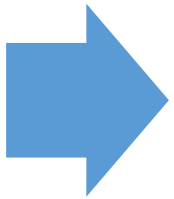
Shared Responsibility

Collaboration between EL and content teachers



Collaboration between teachers, leaders, and families

A shared mindset



Instantiated in mindsets, norms, and structures

Organizing an Ethos

- Include EL staff in cabinet-level meetings, leadership activities, and decision-making
- Embed EL-related content in all professional learning activities
- Design structures and allocate dedicated time for collaborative planning and curriculum development
- Designate a community engagement team that includes diverse staff members
- Augment supports and resources for family liaisons
- Coordinate language acquisition teams that include EL teachers, content teachers, and special educators (for dually identified students)

Organizing an Ethos

"She's on the cabinet, the senior leadership team, so she is constantly carving out space for that [ELs] in ways that I don't think have happened before. And so, I think that has helped us gain more influence in those spaces." - State EL Leader

"We set aside days where our EL coaches worked with the content team to develop synchronous and asynchronous lesson plans and resources for remote learning. Then they modeled them and gathered feedback as they were used so they could adapt each unit in response to what was needed." - District EL Leader

"I have her [the EL specialist] present at all faculty meetings. Sometimes it's just a strategy she wants everyone to try that month and report back. Other times we plan a deeper dive together that will look at some of our data and shine a light on areas of strength and growth." - School EL Leader

Leading a COVID Response

- In states and districts that demonstrated a sense of shared responsibility, leaders were more likely to:
  - Carve out specific time for EL and content teachers to collaborate and connect with counselors.
  - Allocate funds to support family liaisons and communication resources (e.g., translation services, mobile check-ins).
  - Designate time for planning, professional learning, and resource development related to EL instruction before going fully remote.
  - Reach out to community organizations to coordinate services.
  - Create explicit mechanisms for staff to communicate needs and identify supports.

Overall…

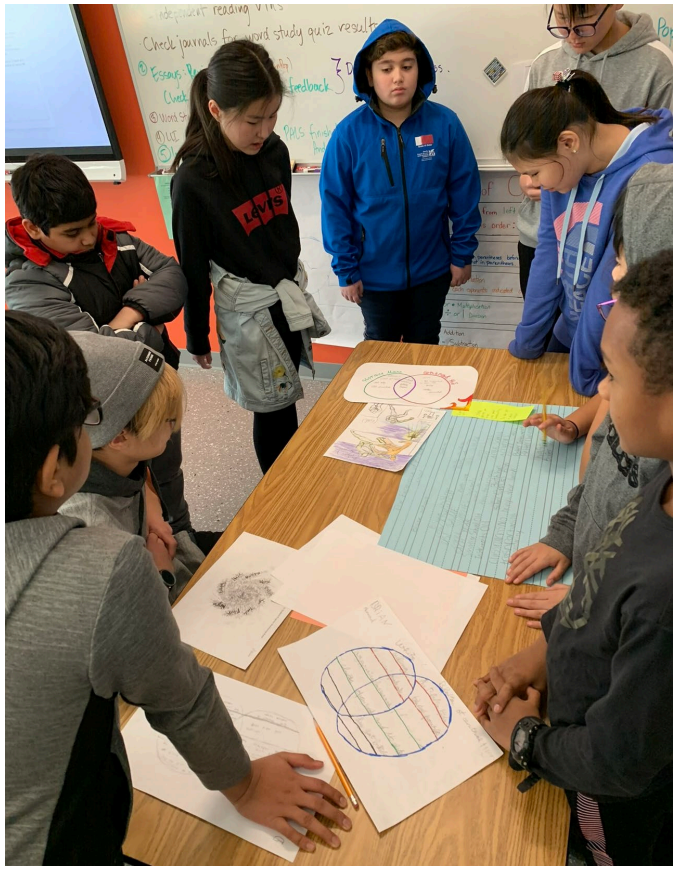
- State and local education agencies that prioritized ELs continued to do so during the pandemic.
- Systems that already centered ELs in mindsets, norms, and structures could be more responsive and nimbler.
- Leadership that promotes asset orientations and an ethos of shared responsibility is needed across education system levels.
- Knowledge of EL policy and practice and the use of evidence can be levers to support these changes.

A Local Educational Agency's Journey Toward COVID Recovery for ELs

Samuel Klein

Arlington Public Schools

Arlington Public Schools (Arlington, VA)



APS ENROLLMENT: 27,940

EL ENROLLMENT: 5632

Map source: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.

- 41 schools
- 220+ English learner teachers
- 34 Bilingual family specialists
- 10 English learner counselors

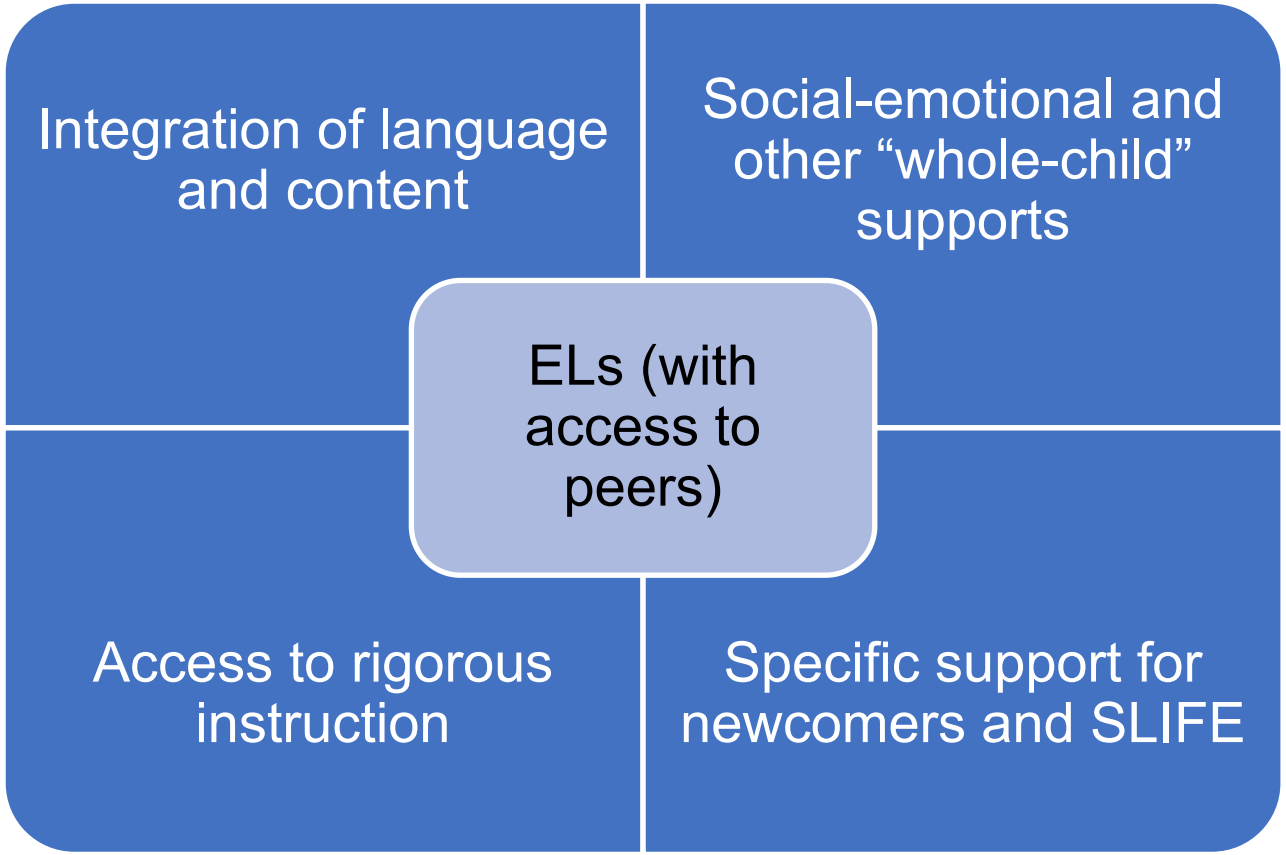
COVID

- After the first month, 97% connectivity, but . . .
  - Learning language and content in tandem, on the computer, is not conducive to “success for all”
  - Students may have had additional obligations
  - Trauma, acculturation, reunification, and . . . the pandemic
    - Education may not have been first on priority list (Maslow)

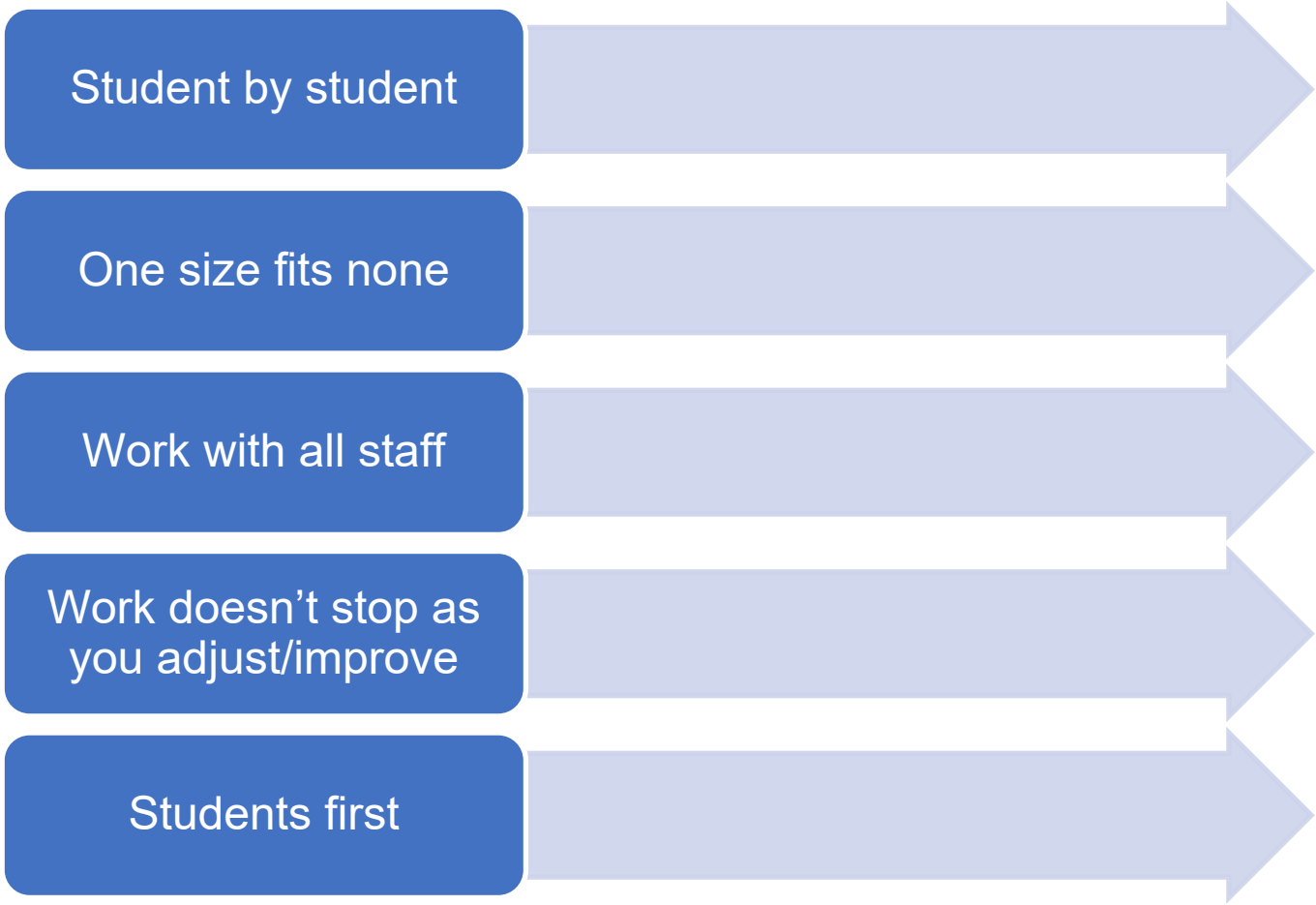
Data 2021-22 to 2023-24

- Chronic absenteeism increased
- Math, Science, reading scores went down
- ELP Progress rates decreased
- Chronic Absenteeism has decreased 6.6%
- Math, reading and science have improved by an average of 11%
- ELP Progress has increased 16.2%
- It looks like a stairstep

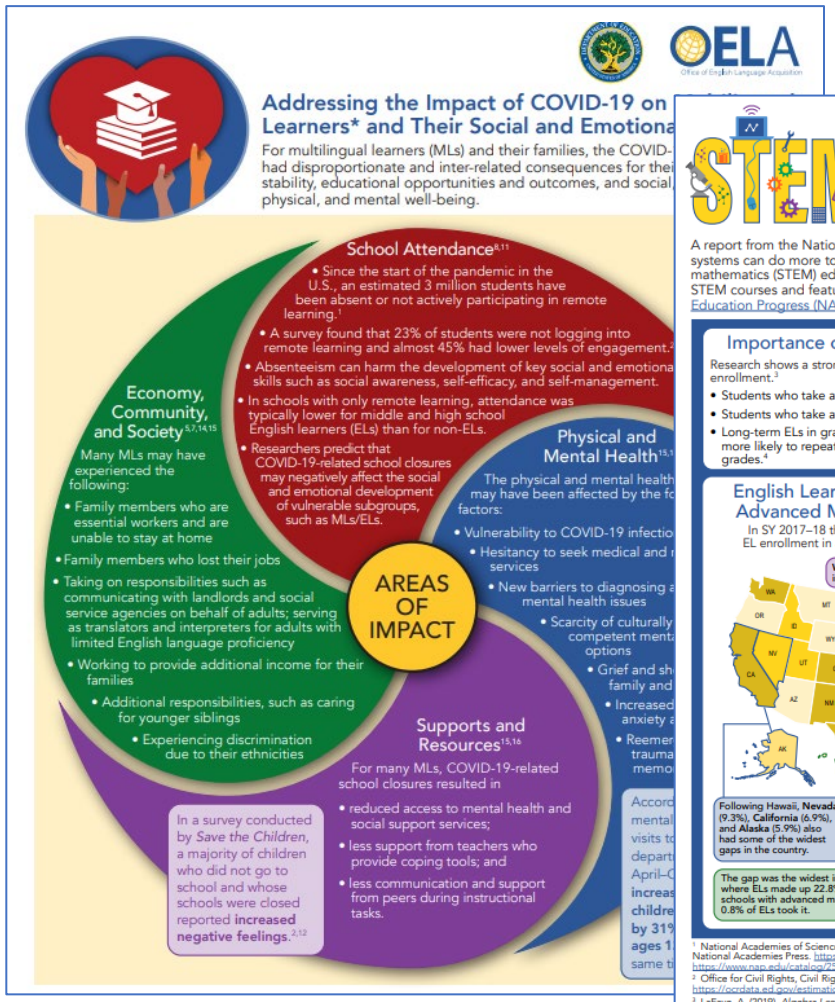
Moving Forward

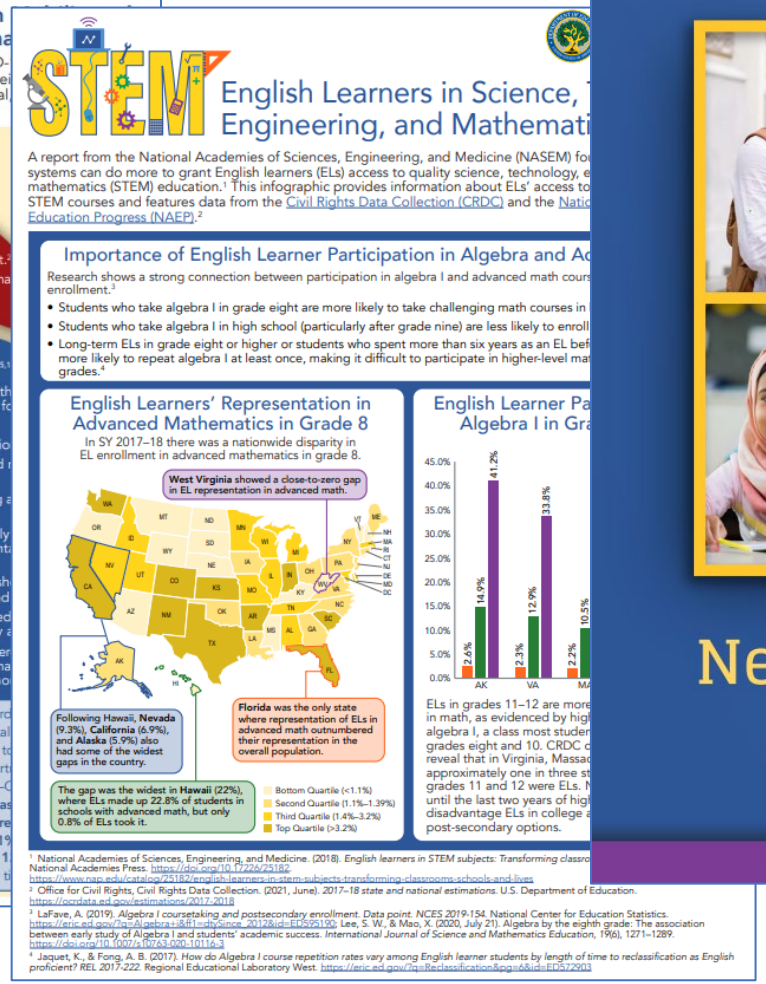


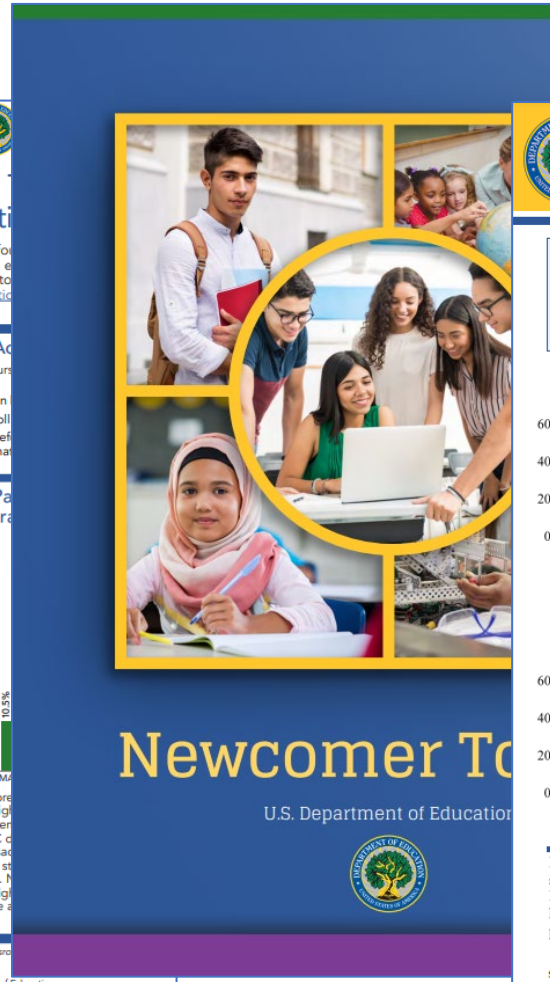
Reflection and Moving Forward

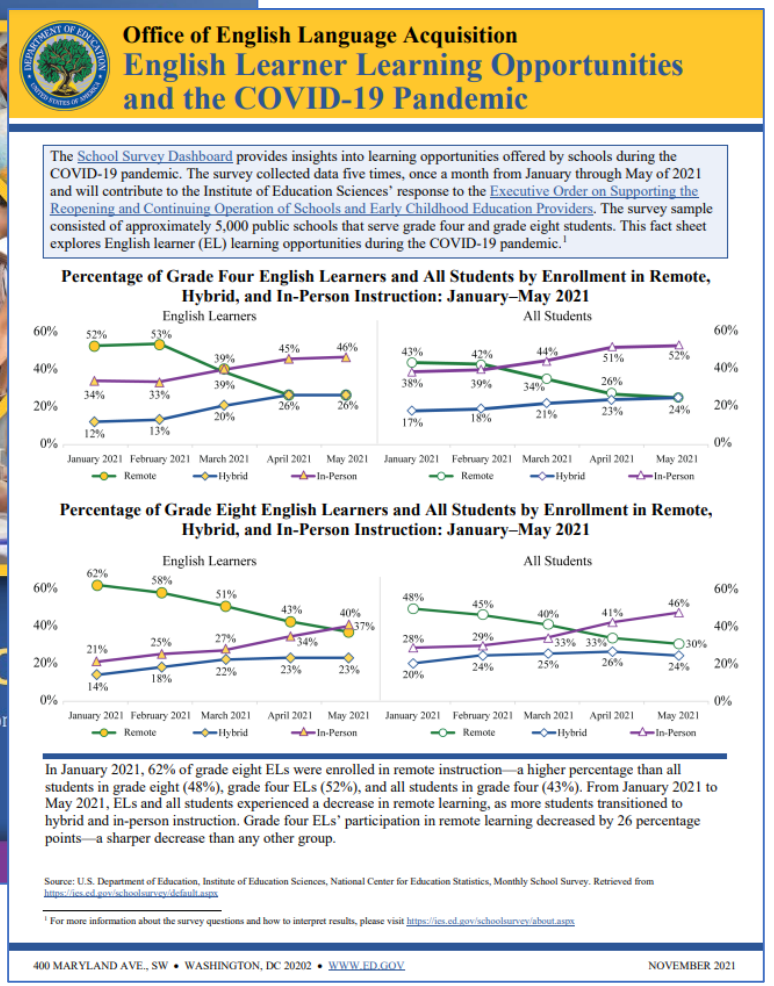


OELA Resources









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Thank You!