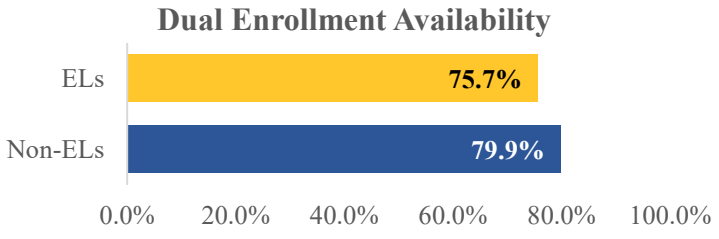
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

English Learners in College Credit-Bearing Courses

This fact sheet uses data from the 2020–21 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) to explore information about dual enrollment and Advanced Placement (AP) exam participation for students enrolled in grades 9 to 12.[1] In the 2020–21 school year, English learners (ELs) made up 7% of high school students.[2] The CRDC is a biennial survey administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. Credits earned through dual enrollment courses and/or AP exams may reduce students' postsecondary course load or shorten their time to earn a degree. Dual enrollment/dual credit programs provide opportunities for high school students to take college-level courses and earn concurrent credit toward a high school diploma and a college degree. Only schools that serve students in grades 9 through 12 offer dual enrollment courses, and not all such schools offer them.

Availability of dual enrollment programs is similar for ELs and non-ELs. Approximately three out of four ELs in grades 9 to 12 attend a school that **does** offer dual enrollment, with approximately four out of five non-ELs attending schools that do offer dual enrollment.

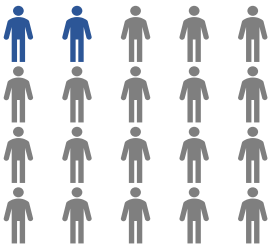


Student Access to Dual Enrollment Courses: School Year 2020–21

In the subset of schools that offer dual enrollment courses, ELs are underrepresented. ELs are less likely than non-EL students to enroll in dual enrollment courses when they are offered. Research suggests that EL students in secondary grades struggle to access rigorous grade-level coursework.[3] Challenges for ELs may lie in scheduling language instruction courses along with a full academic course load, transportation barriers, and/or prerequisites that ELs may not have had an opportunity to complete.[4] Over time, obstacles can accumulate and hinder ELs' opportunity to be prepared for dual enrollment courses when they are available.[5]

English Learners vs. All Students' Dual Enrollment: School Year 2020–21

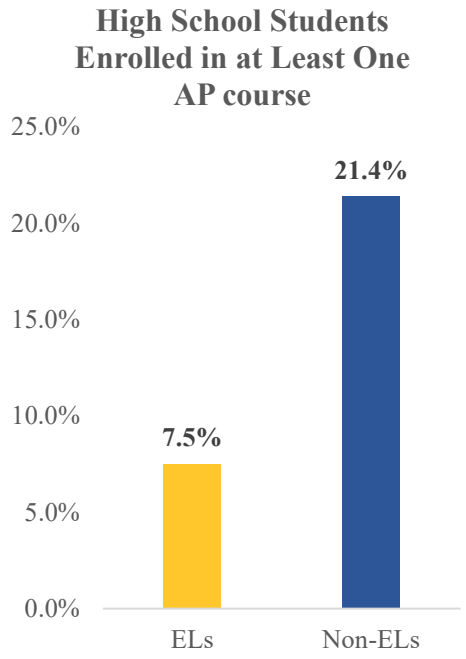
Across all states, **approximately 1 in 20 high school ELs (4.0%)** enrolled in dual enrollment courses when they were available, compared to **2 in 20 students for non-ELs (10.2%).**

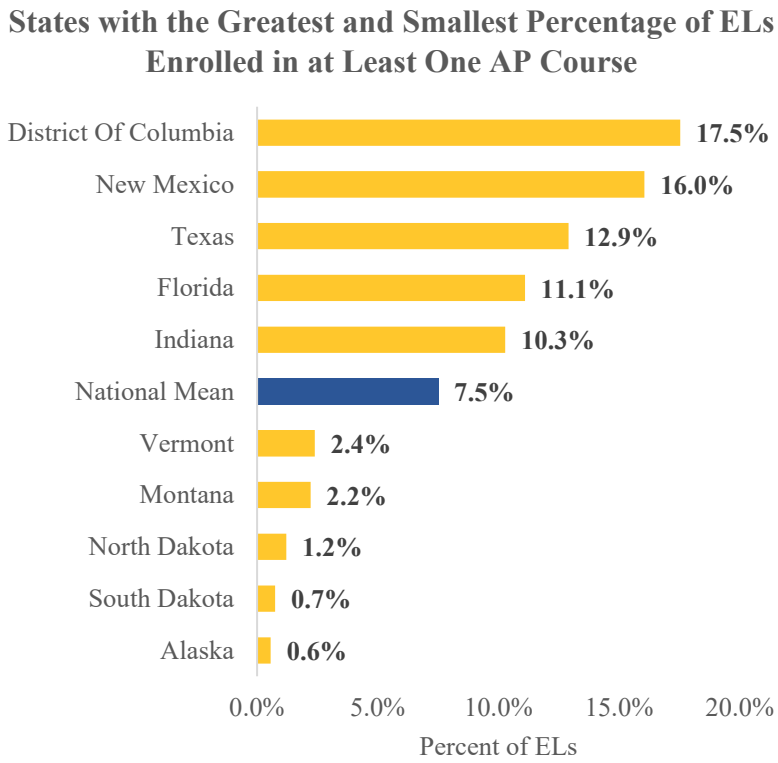


[1] AP refers to a program sponsored by the College Board through which students may earn college credit and advanced college placement by successfully completing AP courses and standardized AP exams.
[2] Based on the author's calculations of CRDC enrollment data, approximately 1,178,704 of 16,809,502 high school students were identified as having limited English proficiency, which is synonymous with English learners for this fact sheet.
[3] Fink, J. (2021, November). How many schools in your state shut out students from dual enrollment or AP? *The Mixed Methods Blog*. Community College Research Center. https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/easyblog/schools-dual-enrollment-ap.html; Umansky, I. M. (2016). Leveled and exclusionary tracking: English learners' access to academic content in middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, *53*(6), 1792–1833.
[4] Andrews, O. S., Linares, J. M., Encarnación, T., & Butler, A. (2024). Dual enrollment and multilingual English learners: From equity gaps toward solutions. In K. Lowry & L. Hardman (Eds.), *Dual enrollment: A story of access, equity and opportunity*. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2024, 19–32. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20634.
[5] Callahan, R. M. (2005). Tracking and high school English learners: Limiting opportunity to learn. *American Educational Research Journal*, *42*(2), 305–328.

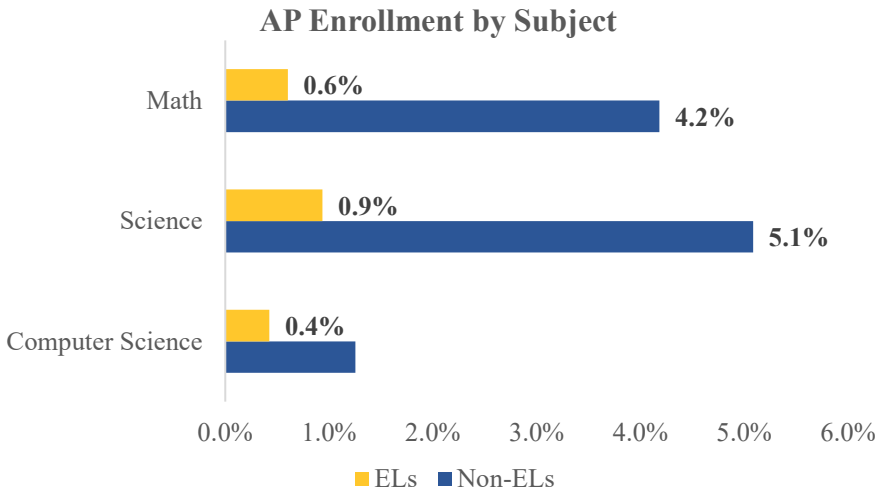
Percentages of High School English Learners Participating in Advanced Placement Courses in SY 2020–21

Of the total number of ELs enrolled in U.S. high schools, 7.5% of ELs were enrolled in at least one AP course in SY 2020–21. Of the total number of high school students not classified as an EL, 21.4% were enrolled in at least one AP course in SY 2020–21.





The District of Columbia had the greatest percentage of ELs (17.5%) enrolled in at least one AP course, which is more than double the national average (7.5%). Only 0.6% of ELs in Alaska took an AP course compared with the national average—a 12.5-fold difference in AP participation.



When analyzing EL enrollment in AP courses by subject area, ELs are underrepresented in mathematics, science, and computer science, ranging from 1 in 100 ELs enrolled in science to approximately 1 in 250 ELs enrolled in computer science. This was fewer than non-ELs, with approximately 1 in 75 non-ELs enrolled in computer science and 1 in 20 enrolled in science courses.