

## Connecticut's English Learners (Grades K–12), School Year 2014–15

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has undertaken a program of comprehensive educational reform with a particular emphasis on closing the large academic achievement gap between high- and low-performing students. This is crucial for the state's 34,833 English Learners (ELs: previously referred to as English Language Learners). ELs are students who lack sufficient mastery of English to "assure equal educational opportunity in the regular school program" (C.G.S. 10-17e). They account for 6.6 percent of all public school students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Standardized assessments, as well as the high school graduation rate, have illuminated a significant achievement gap between ELs and their peers.

### Federal and Connecticut Law

The United States Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) established, and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 affirmed, that ELs are entitled to receive English language services from teachers of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), bilingual-certified teachers, or other personnel who have received training in English language acquisition.<sup>1</sup> This right is protected by the U.S. Office of Civil Rights. ELs are entitled to these services so that they may attain English proficiency and realize mastery of the same core academic content as other students. Therefore, their education is not just the responsibility of TESOL and bilingual teachers but also that of the general education faculty. The Connecticut Bilingual Statute (C.G.S. 10-17e-j) delineates the criteria under which local educational agencies (LEAs) are required to offer bilingual education programs. The 2010 Connecticut State Board of Education's position statement on ELs reaffirmed that access to quality bilingual education and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are crucial for ELs to succeed academically.<sup>2</sup>

Federal grants (Title III) are available to districts and consortia (groups of smaller districts) to support ESL services, although not all LEAs choose to accept them. Nevertheless, all LEAs must provide English language support services to their ELs, and this affects an increasing number of LEAs as the EL population grows and becomes increasingly dispersed across the state.

### An Overview of Connecticut's English Learners (ELs) Grades K–12, 2014–15:

- There were 34,833 ELs in 173 public LEAs.
- There were 143 different dominant languages among ELs and Spanish accounted for 72.4 percent of ELs.
- 96.6 percent of ELs received English language services.
- Over 60 percent of all ELs were in Grades K–5.
- 18 percent of ELs were also identified for special education.
- 76.8 percent of ELs were eligible for either free or reduced-price meals.
- Connecticut received \$5.05 million in Title III funds for English language services.
- In the 2013-14 school year, 97 percent of EL students took the annual English language proficiency assessment; 59.4 percent made progress from their prior assessment, while 25.9 percent demonstrated English proficiency.
- In the 2013–14 school year, 1,918 ELs (5.9 percent) met the CSDE's English mastery standard and exited EL status.
- The 2014 four-year cohort graduation rate for ELs was 63.0 percent compared with 87.9 percent for non-ELs.
- The CSDE designated bilingual education and TESOL as certification shortage areas for the 2014–15 and 2015–16 school years.

### Linguistic Diversity in Public Schools (Grades K–12)

Under C.G.S. 10-17f and NCLB, LEAs must identify the dominant language of all new K–12 students and this is typically done through a home language survey.<sup>4</sup> In the 2014–15 school year, there were 80,007 Connecticut students that spoke 175 languages other than English (table 1). Over the last five years, the number of students with dominant languages other than English increased by 8.7 percent while English speakers dropped by 5.6 percent thus increasing the linguistic diversity

TABLE 1: Top 10 Dominant Languages (Grades K–12), 2014–15

Language	Students	Percentage of All Students	Percentage that are EL	Change in Students 2010–11 to 2014–15
English	448,033	84.8%	–	-5.6%
Spanish	51,738	9.8%	48.8%	8.3%
Portuguese	3,079	0.6%	36.9%	8.0%
Mandarin <sup>3</sup>	2,304	0.4%	28.7%	-3.9%
Polish	2,200	0.4%	24.3%	-3.6%
Arabic	1,869	0.4%	52.3%	61.1%
Creole-Haitian	1,704	0.3%	42.8%	-1.0%
Albanian	1,210	0.2%	33.6%	-4.4%
Vietnamese	1,204	0.2%	30.7%	3.5%
Urdu	1,164	0.2%	33.5%	2.1%
All others	13,535	2.6%	32.5%	14.4%
Total	528,040	100.0%	6.6%	-3.7%

of Connecticut’s public schools. For example, the number of Arabic-speaking students grew by 61.1 percent, highlighting how changes over time in the composition of the student population are in part driven by global political, economic and environmental instability. Linguistic diversity was also driven by the rapid growth in the number of speakers of smaller languages—“all others” in table 1—which collectively grew by 14.4 percent. These included Telugu (47.8 percent: 187 students), Tamil (64.8 percent: 164 students), Bengali (25.3 percent: 130 students), Hindi (20.9 percent: 109 students) Bangla (71.2 percent: 99 students) and Twi/Fante (70.4 percent: 88 students).

**English Learners**

NCLB and Connecticut law also require LEAs to determine the English proficiency of students whose dominant language is not English. CSDE guidance to LEAs recommends that the EL identification procedure should include the use of a language proficiency test, student interviews and a review of the academic record if one exists. In practice, the identification process varies by LEA. Determining the EL status of transfers can pose a particular challenge, as the exchange of student records may be delayed or the record itself may be incomplete.

In the 2014–15 school year, 80,007 students had a dominant language other than English but of these students only 34,833 (43.5 percent) were identified as ELs (figure 1). During the last five years, the number of ELs grew 13.8 percent while the total number of students declined 3.7 percent. As a result, ELs increased from 5.6 percent to 6.6 percent of all Connecticut’s public school students in Kindergarten through 12th grade. Nationally, 9.1 percent of all public school students were ELs.<sup>5</sup>

**English Language Services**

Under federal law, which was also upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974), ELs are entitled to receive English language support services until they demonstrate English proficiency by meeting the SEA’s (state educational agency) English mastery standard. Research on English language acquisition identifies two interrelated sets of language skills that compose language proficiency: basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), which refers to contextualized conversational language skills, and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), which includes more abstract decontextualized language skills.<sup>6</sup> These studies suggest that while native-like proficiency in BICS takes about three to five years, CALP requires four to seven years.<sup>7</sup> Although some research questions the distinctiveness of BICS

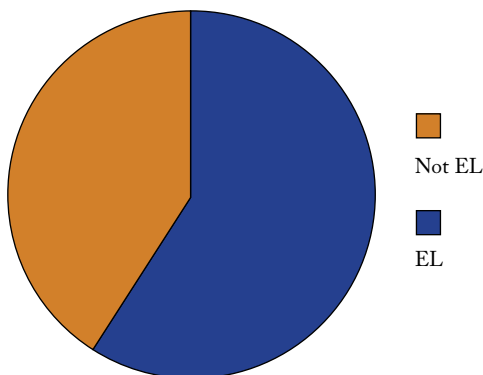
and CALP skills in practice, the general consensus in the field is that the acquisition of academic English language skills is crucial for ELs’ academic success, particularly as their grade level increases.<sup>8</sup>

In 2014–15, 28.4 percent of ELs participated in a bilingual education program (table 2). The state bilingual grant totaled \$1.9 million.<sup>9</sup> Mandatory bilingual education originates in and functions in accord with Connecticut statutory law (Section 10-17e-j). Specifically, the CSDE annually identifies schools with 20 or more ELs who have the same dominant language, and these schools are required to offer a bilingual education program in that language in the following school year.<sup>10</sup> Based on 2013–14 enrollment figures, the CSDE identified 253 mandated bilingual programs in 232 schools across 36 different LEAs for the 2014–15 school year. Spanish accounted for 232 bilingual programs, followed by Portuguese (11), Creole-Haitian (3), Arabic (3), Karen (2), and one each in Polish and Serbo-Croatian. Twenty Alliance Districts accounted for 88 percent of the mandated bilingual programs and 94 percent of the ELs that participated in them. Sixteen other LEAs, including five public charter schools and LEARN (a regional educational service center—RESC), accounted for the other bilingual programs.

There are two types of bilingual programs. Transitional bilingual education programs use the student’s dominant language (decreasing over time) and English in instruction so that the student ultimately attains English language proficiency. Connecticut’s bilingual statute previously limited participation in a transitional bilingual program to 30 months but this was amended in 2015 to allow LEAs to apply to the CSDE to extend eligibility up to 60 months for individual students. Dual language bilingual programs also use students’ dominant languages and English in instruction, but unlike transitional programs their goal is to develop proficiency in both languages. For example, LEARN’s Dual Language and Arts Magnet Middle School in Waterford seeks “to build a student body that is bilingual, bi-literate, and multicultural.”<sup>11</sup> There is no statutory time limit for participation in dual language bilingual programs. Over the last four years, the number of ELs enrolled in either transitional (22.5 percent) or dual language (25 percent) bilingual programs has increased faster than the overall growth in the number of ELs (15.2 percent).

Students who have exhausted their eligibility for participation in a transitional bilingual education program but still have not met the CSDE’s English mastery standard receive language transition support services (LTSS). LTSS is a mix of the various ESL services described below and, over the last four years, the number of ELs receiving LTSS has remained stable.

**FIGURE 1:**  
EL Status of Students with a Dominant Language Other than English, 2014–15



**TABLE 2: ELs by English Language Service, 2014–15**

Service	ELs	Percentage of ELs	Change in ELs 2011–12 to 2014–15
Transitional bilingual	8,433	24.2%	22.5%
Dual language bilingual	1,469	4.2%	25.0%
Language transition support	5,536	15.9%	0.5%
Pull-out ESL	9,369	26.9%	10.3%
Push-in ESL/Co-Teaching	3,021	8.7%	49.0%
Sheltered ESL	1,239	3.6%	17.9%
Other types of ESL	4,597	13.2%	10.1%
Parental refusal of ESL services	1,169	3.4%	26.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>34,833</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>15.2%</b>

Over half of all ELs received various types of ESL support services. These include ESL pull-out in which ELs meet with TESOL-certified teachers (26.9 percent); ESL push-in/co-teaching, where TESOL-certified teachers provide instruction in the general education classrooms (8.7 percent); sheltered English instruction, which refers to teaching English through content areas (3.6 percent); and other services, including tutoring (13.2 percent). In practice, students often receive a mix of all these and other types of services. Among ESL service models, push-in/co-teaching experienced the largest growth (49 percent).

There were 3.4 percent of ELs who did not receive bilingual education or ESL services due to parental refusal and, over the last four years, their numbers increased 26.2 percent. There are many personal reasons parents refuse English language services, including a preference for “English immersion.” While recognizing the legitimacy of this option, some ESL departments have taken steps to better engage parents of ELs and clearly explain to them the variety of program options and supports that are available to their children. They are accomplishing this through increased ESL teacher outreach to parents; professional development with regard to ESL services for central office personnel and in particular those in student registration; streamlining the EL identification process; and the establishment of welcome centers. These ESL departments have also continued to reach out to parents who declined ESL services in prior school years. The numbers of ELs who did not receive ESL services fell by 61.7 percent in Windham and 18.4 percent in New Haven over the last four years partly because of these measures. ELs also identified for special education were nearly twice as likely as other ELs not to receive ESL services due to parental refusal (5.6 percent versus 2.9 percent). These ELs accounted for 30 percent of those whose parents refused ESL services although they represent only 18 percent of all ELs.

### Bilingual and TESOL Teaching Positions and Teachers

Due to the increase in the number of ELs over the last five years, the demand for bilingual education and ESL services has increased. Over the last four years, the number of available positions that LEAs sought to fill increased for bilingual education from 18 to 39 and for TESOL from 34 to 62.

The CSDE identified Bilingual Education, PK–12, as a certification shortage area each of the past five school years and TESOL, PK–12, was identified twice.<sup>12</sup> They were again identified as shortage areas for the 2015–16 school year based on a number of factors. Public LEAs staffed much lower percentages of available bilingual (64.1 percent) and TESOL (82.3 percent) positions than for all positions (92.2 percent). Higher percentages of bilingual (30.8 percent) and TESOL (12.9 percent) positions remained vacant due to a lack of qualified applicants, according to LEAs, than for all positions (4.9 percent). Illustrative of this problem, there were far fewer appropriately certified applicants per available position for bilingual education (5.5) and TESOL (8) positions than for all positions (19). Furthermore, the rate of new and renewed bilingual education teacher certificates per available position in the 2014–15 school year were among the lowest for any certificate, while TESOL was slightly above the median.

The difficulty LEAs already face in staffing bilingual education and TESOL positions may be exacerbated by retirements over the next five years. As of October 1, 2013, 18.2 percent of all certified staff employed were eligible for retirement, and this will increase to 26.9 percent over the next five years. In contrast, 46.3 percent of bilingual and 28.5 percent of TESOL teachers will be eligible to retire.

To address bilingual and TESOL teacher shortages, the CSDE also created the Alternate Route to Certification for Teachers of English Language Learners (ARCTELL) program, which includes courses and

fieldwork. The certified teachers who complete this program become cross-endorsed in either bilingual education or TESOL.

### EL Student Demographics: Dominant Language

In the 2014–15 school year, ELs spoke 143 dominant languages with 22 of them spoken by 100 or more ELs (table 3). The number of Arabic speakers increased dramatically (72 percent: 409 students) from 2010–11 to 2014–15. Spanish (14.2 percent: 3,134 students) and Portuguese (19.3 percent: 184 students) also experienced significant growth. Conversely, the number of both Creole-Haitian (2 percent) and French speakers (5.1 percent) has declined. World events such as instability and natural disasters influence migration to the United States and consequently affect student demographics.

**TABLE 3: Top 10 Dominant Languages for ELs, 2014–15**

Language	ELs	Percentage of ELs	Change in ELs 2010–11 to 2014–15
Spanish	25,233	72.4%	14.2%
Portuguese	1,137	3.3%	19.3%
Arabic	977	2.8%	72.0%
Creole-Haitian	730	2.1%	-2.0%
Mandarin <sup>13</sup>	662	1.9%	-5.0%
Polish	535	1.5%	5.3%
Albanian	406	1.2%	-12.9%
Urdu	390	1.1%	1.3%
Vietnamese	370	1.1%	8.5%
French	244	0.7%	-5.1%
All others	4,149	11.9%	15.9%
Total	34,833	100.0%	13.8%

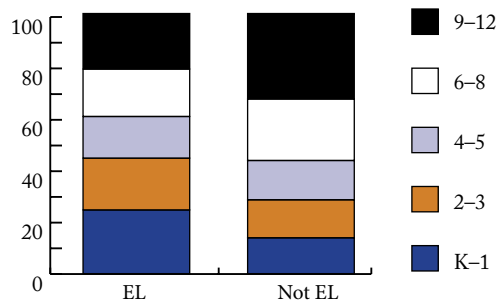
While diversity enriches school districts, addressing the needs of students who speak one of the numerically smaller languages may also pose challenges to ESL programs. Often, there are no certified teachers to support these languages and communication with parents who only speak their native language may be difficult. To address this, some ESL programs partner with local ethnic cultural organizations to find bilingual tutors and other language resources. They also hire tutors from native speakers that have recently graduated. Districts also use online interpretation and language resources as well as borrowing resources developed by other LEAs and RESCs. Newer students, immigrants and refugees may also be partnered with students who share the same native language but are more proficient in English. This can help with the development of their English language skills while providing social and cultural learning.

### Grade

ELs were more heavily concentrated in the lower grades than other students (figure 2).<sup>14</sup> Comparing ELs with their counterparts, 24.5 percent were in K–1 (13.8 percent of all others) and 19.8 percent in grades 2–3 (14.6 percent of all others) but only 21.4 percent were in high school compared with 32.9 percent for all other students. However, the largest numeric increase in ELs over the last four years occurred in high school (1,109). Spanish (79.6 percent) and Arabic (8.6 percent) speakers accounted for most of the increase in high school ELs.

Bilingual education was more prevalent in the lower grades accounting for 41.1 percent of all Kindergarten and first-grade ELs and 33.1 percent of second- and third-graders (table 4). In each grade band, the

**FIGURE 2:**  
Percentage of EL and Non-EL Students by Grade, 2014–15



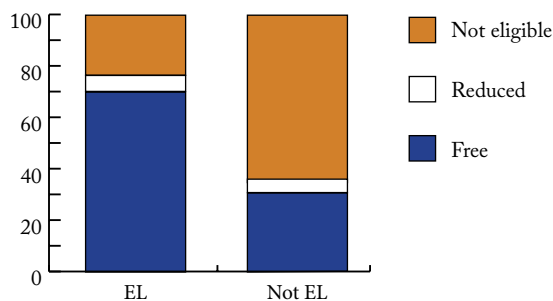
number of ELs receiving bilingual education increased over the last four years. Pull-out ESL and push-in/co-teaching ESL services were also more common in the lower grades. For ELs in middle school, bilingual education, LTSS and pull-out ESL were equally important service options. Sheltered English was also a more frequent option for middle school ELs compared with those in the lower grades.

The number of high school ELs who participated in bilingual programs increased dramatically over the last four years (53.5 percent). Push-in/co-teaching occurred less in high school than in lower grades because it requires ESL teachers to have secondary-level content expertise. Nevertheless, the number of high school ELs participating in a push-in/co-teaching program more than doubled over the last four years (174.5 percent). Sheltered English was more common in high school as was parental refusal of services.

**Eligibility for Free or Reduced-price Meals**

ELs were more than twice as likely as others to be eligible for free or reduced-price meals (76.8 percent compared with 35 percent), illuminating that many ELs have multiple service needs (figure 3). During the last five years, the number of ELs eligible for free or reduced-price meals increased more than for others (10.1 percent versus 6.3 percent).

**FIGURE 3:**  
Percentage Eligible for Free or Reduced-price Meals by EL Status, 2014–15



**Other Demographic Characteristics of ELs**

Nearly 1 percent of all ELs were homeless, compared with 0.3 percent of all others. Nearly all homeless ELs were Spanish speakers (93.5 percent). The number of homeless ELs grew 12.6 percent over the last five years. Among non-ELs, 3.9 percent were identified as either gifted or talented and, in contrast, only 0.2 percent of all ELs were identified.

**TABLE 4: EL Program by Grade, 2014–15**

Program	K-1	2-3	4-5	6-8	9-12
Bilingual	41.1%	33.1%	21.2%	22.8%	19.8%
LTSS	0.0%	10.5%	21.9%	24.3%	27.5%
Pull-out	33.4%	32.3%	30.8%	22.3%	15.4%
Push-in/Co-teaching	11.1%	10.2%	10.0%	6.8%	5.0%
Sheltered English	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	5.5%	10.9%
ESL, Other	11.7%	11.2%	13.0%	13.8%	16.4%
Parental refusal	2.3%	2.3%	2.6%	4.6%	5.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Two-thirds of gifted or talented ELs were in grades 3 through 6. Nearly 70 percent of these ELs were in just three LEAs.

**Geography of ELs: Education Reform Districts**

To examine the geographic distribution of ELs, districts were grouped by the CSDE’s education reform categories: the 10 Education Reform Alliance Districts;<sup>15</sup> the 20 non-Education Reform Alliance Districts;<sup>16</sup> RESCs; Public Charter Schools; State Districts; and all Other LEAs. The geographic distribution of Connecticut’s ELs is characterized by the concentration of the majority in the largest urban districts and growth in the number of ELs in smaller suburban and rural districts that in the past had few, if any, ELs (“low-incidence” districts). The 10 Education Reform Alliance Districts (51.1 percent) and 20 non-Education Reform Alliance Districts (26.1 percent) accounted for over three quarters of all ELs, although their share of all students was only 39 percent (table 5). In contrast, the Other LEAs (139 districts) accounted for just 19 percent of ELs but 55.1 percent of all students. ELs were 15.8 percent of all students in the Education Reform Alliance Districts and 9.7 percent of those in the non-Education Reform Alliance Districts, but they were only 2.3 percent of all students in the Other LEAs.

Illustrative of the concentration of ELs, the 80 schools with the largest EL enrollments were all located in 13 Alliance Districts and Norwich Free Academy.<sup>17</sup> They accounted for 42.5 percent of all Connecticut’s ELs even though they had only 12.8 percent of all students. Most of the ELs in these schools were Spanish speakers (85.4 percent) and were eligible for free or reduced-priced meals (84.8 percent). In addition, 16.8 percent were also identified for special education.

There were some interesting differences between ELs in the 30 Alliance Districts compared with those in Other LEAs. First, there were differences in the prevalence of dominant languages. Eighty percent of ELs in the Alliance Districts had a dominant language of Spanish compared with just 38.6 percent among ELs in the Other LEAs. The Alliance Districts accounted for most ELs with dominant languages of Spanish (85.5 percent), Portuguese (67.4 percent) and Creole-Haitian (84.1 percent). In the Other LEAs, dominant languages such as Mandarin (6.7 percent versus 0.8 percent), Arabic (5.2 percent versus 2.3 percent), Polish (4.1 percent versus 0.9 percent), Albanian (3.4 percent versus 0.7 percent) and Japanese (2.8 versus 0.1 percent) were larger percentages of ELs than in the Alliance Districts.

A second difference was the prevalence of bilingual education in the Alliance Districts. According to Connecticut law, bilingual education programs are mandated in schools with 20 or more ELs who speak the same language. Given the concentration of Spanish speakers in these

TABLE 5: EL Enrollment by School Reform Categories, 2014–15

District Category	ELs	Change in ELs 2010–11 to 2014–15	Change in Non-ELs 2010–11 to 2014–15	ELs as a Percentage of All Students	Percentage of Connecticut's ELs
Education Reform Alliance Districts	17,815	10.8%	0.4%	15.8%	51.1%
Non-Education Reform Alliance Districts	9,074	12.2%	-5.6%	9.7%	26.1%
RESCs	512	92.5%	45.4%	4.3%	1.5%
Public charters	428	85.3%	39.4%	5.5%	1.2%
State districts	361	31.8%	-3.8%	3.2%	1.0%
Other LEAs	6,643	17.2%	-8.0%	2.3%	19.1%
Total	34,833	13.8%	-4.7%	6.6%	100.0%

districts, it is understandable that they accounted for nearly 90 percent of all mandated bilingual programs and 95 percent of all bilingual education students in the 2014–15 school year. In the Alliance Districts, 35 percent of ELs were in a bilingual program compared with just 5 percent in Other LEAs. The number of ELs in the Alliance Districts in a bilingual program increased by 25.9 percent over the last four years.

A third difference was that while most ELs were eligible for free or reduced-price meals in the Education Reform Alliance Districts (85.1 percent), non-Education Reform Alliance Districts (78.8 percent), Public Charter Schools (90.7 percent) and RESCs (80.9 percent), far fewer were in the Other LEAs (50.8 percent). Despite these differences among ELs, they were more likely to be eligible for free or reduced-price meals than others in all the education reform categories, for example, Education Reform Alliance Districts (85.1 percent versus 75.9 percent), non-Education Reform Alliance Districts (78.8 percent versus 46.5 percent) and Other LEAs (50.8 percent versus 15.9 percent).

During the last five years, the number of ELs increased in all the categories. The most notable increases were in RESCs (92.5 percent) and Public Charter Schools (85.3 percent). Fifty-four percent of all the LEAs had an increase in their number of ELs, while 14 percent stayed the same, and 32 percent had fewer ELs. New Haven (601), Danbury (442), Waterbury (330) and Bridgeport (316) experienced the largest numerical increases.

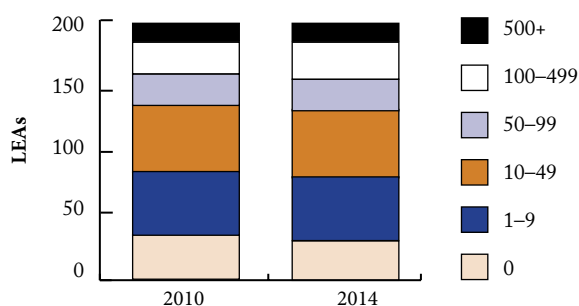
Currently, 173 LEAs (86.1 percent) had ELs compared with 167 five years ago (figure 4). Fifteen LEAs had 500 or more ELs of which 13 were Alliance Districts. Collectively, they accounted for 72.6 percent of all ELs.

Conversely, 14 percent of LEAs had no ELs and 51.7 percent were “low-incidence” districts that had between one and 49 ELs.

Low-incidence districts face a number of unique challenges in establishing and maintaining an ESL program. One of the most fundamental challenges is the fluctuation in the number of ELs enrolled at any one time. The EL student population tends to be more mobile than others and the movement of a few families into or out of a low-incidence district may significantly affect its ESL program. Among the 35 districts that did not have any ELs in the 2009–10 school year, 10 had at least one EL in the succeeding five school years and, similarly, among the 28 districts without any ELs in the 2013–14 school year, eight had had at least one EL in the preceding five school years (and additionally one is a new LEA). Fluctuations in the enrollment of ELs impedes the accumulation of ESL resources and capacity and the development of institutional knowledge of current ESL educational best practices along with state and federal EL legislation and regulations. LEAs may respond to small and sometimes fluctuating EL enrollments with limited ESL budgets that require resources and staff to be spread broadly. Budget constraints may limit the ability to hire certified TESOL teachers. Relatedly, low-incidence districts may also have a more difficult time attracting TESOL teachers, particularly with potential variations in the size of the program from year to year. As a result, some low-incidence districts must use ESL-trained intermediate administrators or paraprofessionals to provide pull-out or push-in ESL support. ESL professional development (PD) for non-ESL teachers may also be a lower priority due to the small number of ELs.

Low-incidence districts may lack native language resources within the broader community to assist in gathering information and facilitating communication with parents. They may also lack native language assessments to identify the student's level in their native language and other resources to support academic instruction. One ESL teacher from an LEA with eight ELs speaking six different languages noted that the lack of native resources and the goal of rapid English language acquisition often results in the loss of native language skills.

FIGURE 4:  
Distribution of LEAs by Size of EL Enrollment,  
2010–11 and 2014–15



### Identification for Special Education

Over the last five years, the numbers of ELs who were identified for special education increased by 36.1 percent, compared with a 5.8 percent increase for others (table 6).<sup>18</sup> The largest numeric increase was for ELs identified with specific learning disabilities (795). The number of ELs with ADD/ADHD (350) and autism (164) more than doubled. Although ELs identified for special education spoke 87 different languages, Spanish speakers were the majority (83.4 percent) and they accounted for most of the recent growth (79.7 percent). The number of Arabic speakers also nearly doubled. Because of this recent growth, the

proportion of special education students who were also EL grew from 7.3 percent to 9.2 percent. Nationally, 9.1 percent of all special education students were also ELs.<sup>19</sup> Among Connecticut's ELs, 18 percent were identified for special education compared with 12.5 percent of all other students. Nationally, 12.3 percent of ELs that participated in a "language instruction program" (not all ELs) were identified for special education compared with 17.6 percent in Connecticut.<sup>20</sup>

In a publication on ELs and special education, the Connecticut Administrators for English Language Learners (CAPELL) addressed the issues of over-identification and under-identification for special education.<sup>21</sup> While cautioning that "we cannot assume that because an ELL is having academic difficulties, the ELL has a disability," CAPELL also warned that "the practice of waiting a number of years before referring a student for special education services is detrimental to ELLs who may truly have disabilities." When considering referral of an EL for special education, educators must be cognizant of the formal educational history of the students and recognize that academic language acquisition may take four to seven years and, therefore, ELs may exhibit academic learning difficulties. CAPELL noted that ELs may experience memory and attention problems as they try to assimilate new information and experience exhaustion due to the difficulty of this task. It is also normal for ELs to experience a "silent period" as they try to master new academic content and adapt to a new culture. ELs may also exhibit culturally inappropriate behavior and experience social and emotional problems as part of the process of transitioning to a new culture. With these cautions in mind, CAPELL suggests that reasons for referring an EL for special education may include ELs exhibiting behavioral and cultural difficulties in both the first and second languages; demonstrating limited academic progress over time; and performing differently from their peers. An additional factor for referral to special education may be parents or educators confirming academic or behavioral difficulties.

### An ESL Program's Success Story

In the 2014–15 school year, Montville had 2,300 students of which 94 (4.1 percent) were ELs. Immigrant families looking for employment had been attracted to the area by the casinos and other local businesses. ELs spoke Cantonese (30), Mandarin (19), Spanish (17), Tibetan (13) and nine other languages (15). Many students, such as those from Tibet, had never attended a school nor understood a written language. To build its resources and capacity, Montville's ESL program has partnered with local cultural and immigrant associations and this resulted in the establishment of a 24-hour Asian translation hotline that not only assists the schools but also the fire and police departments. The ESL program often employs college graduates who are fluent in multiple Asian languages. Local businesses have also provided support for the ESL program.

The ESL program provides mainstream teachers with information on the abilities of individual students and helps to set expectations for performance on each subject. It also offers an after-school program for ELs that provides assistance with their core curriculum course work. In the 2013–14 school year, Montville was one of only 10 Title III subgrantees to meet both its AMAO 1 and AMAO 2 targets (Annual Measurable Achievable Objectives). For the graduating classes of 2010 and 2012, 100 percent of all ELs graduated. During the last four years, two former ELs from Tibet have been awarded the highly competitive Gates Millennium Scholarships, which cover all college costs.

**TABLE 6: ELs Identified for Special Education (Grades K–12), 2014–15**

Primary Disability	EL Special Education Students, 2014–15	Change in Students 2010–11 to 2014–15	Primary Disability's Percentage of EL Special Education Students	Primary Disability's Percentage of Non-EL Special Education Students
Specific learning disabilities	2,727	41.1%	43.5%	33.2%
Speech/language impairment	1,350	10.8%	21.5%	13.9%
ADD/ADHD	639	121.1%	10.2%	14.7%
Intellectually disabled	312	26.3%	5.0%	3.4%
Autism	287	133.3%	4.5%	12.1%
Other health impairment	273	10.5%	4.4%	6.2%
Emotional disturbance	235	16.9%	3.8%	8.4%
Developmental delay	205	30.6%	3.3%	2.5%
Multiple disabilities	147	34.9%	2.3%	4.3%
Hearing impairment	62	26.5%	1.0%	0.8%
Visual impairment	10	25.0%	0.2%	0.2%
Traumatic brain injury	10	-9.1%	0.2%	0.2%
Orthopedic impairment	4	-33.3%	0.1%	0.1%
Deaf-blindness	0	-100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	6,261	36.1%	100.0%	100.0%

The nature of the identification process is crucial for ELs to be appropriately identified for special education. CAPELL stressed that ESL teachers or administrators should be involved in the process. They also cautioned that due to the complexity of determining whether an EL has a disability, information from multiple sources should be used. These may include a native language assessment, particularly for ELs who have some fluency in their native language. CAPELL's handbook included a standardized checklist for the identification process that focuses on such factors as native and second language development, academic achievement, whether appropriate ESL interventions been implemented and the physical and psychological health of the student, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

As with all ELs, those that have been identified for special education retain their EL status with the right to receive English language services until they meet the state's English mastery standard. No provision in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) authorizes the individualized education program (IEP) to change a student's EL designation before that student has attained English mastery according to the state's criteria.<sup>22</sup> Federal guidance recommends that IEP teams should include persons with expertise in second language acquisition for ELs with disabilities and consideration must be given to the student's language needs. In its handbook, CAPELL noted that many ELs identified for special education may never have received appropriate services because many countries do not offer special education services. It recommends, therefore, a collaborative approach between ESL and special education providers that coordinates services to meet the individual needs of each student. IDEA also requires that LEAs take whatever action necessary to ensure that parents understand the proceedings of IEP team meetings, including arranging for an interpreter. Ideally, the joint special education and ESL team will agree on a plan of interventions, which will be reviewed in light of student progress.

In comparison with other ELs, those identified for special education were less likely to be in a bilingual program (19.1 percent versus 30.5 percent). This gap was smaller in the lower grades (39.2 percent versus 41.3 percent in K–1 and 27.4 percent in 2–3 versus 34.1 percent) but increased in middle school (15.8 percent versus 25.2 percent) and was pronounced in high school (9.8 percent versus 22.5 percent). Some of the gap in middle school and high school was accounted for by the fact that more ELs identified for special education were receiving LTSS than all ELs, meaning that they had already participated in a bilingual program and exhausted their eligibility without having met the CSDE's English mastery standard to exit EL status. For example, 39.7 percent of ELs identified for special education received LTSS services in high school compared with just 24.1 percent of other ELs. Growth in the number of ELs in special education who participated in a bilingual program was much lower than the overall growth in the number of all ELs identified for special education (20.8 percent versus 36.1 percent). ELs identified for special education were also less likely than all ELs to participate in ESL pull-out or sheltered English programs.

Parental refusal of bilingual or ESL services was higher among ELs identified for special education than for other ELs (5.6 percent versus 2.9 percent). This was true at all grade levels and was particularly pronounced in high school (8.5 percent versus 4.1 percent). On the IEP, parents may opt for only special education services for their children or parents with educators may determine that due to the severity of the disability that ESL services may not best serve the interests of the student.

ELs received nearly the same median special education hours (6 versus 6.4) and the same total school hours (32.5) as non-EL special education students. They also spent about the same median percentage of time with their nondisabled peers (89.6 percent versus 88.9 percent). ELs

were less likely to receive related services than other special education students (52.9 percent versus 57.6 percent), but this percentage was more than it was five years ago (49.1 percent). The most common related services that ELs received included speech/language pathology (30 percent), counseling (17.3 percent) and social work (11.5 percent).

Under IDEA, all students with disabilities must be included in all general state assessments, with or without accommodations, and this includes both ESEA Title I and Title III assessments.<sup>23</sup> The IEP team or the 504 Plan team should decide whether the student requires test accommodations or should take an alternate assessment as provided for by the state educational authority. In spring 2015, students with significant cognitive disabilities may take the Connecticut Alternate Assessment, which replaces the Skills Checklist. The exception to this is that these students with significant cognitive disabilities in grades 5, 8 and 10 will take the science portion of the Skills Checklist.

In spring 2014, 92.1 percent of ELs identified for special education participated in the annual English language proficiency (ELP) assessment and 90.1 percent completed it. Among those who completed the assessment, 43 percent made progress, or increased their overall score compared with their most recent prior assessment and 12.1 percent achieved an overall level of proficiency or better. These percentages were lower than for other ELs (63.1 percent and 28.4 percent respectively).

In the 2014–15 school year, most ELs identified for special education were in the 30 Alliance Districts (79.4 percent), followed by Other LEAs (16.6 percent), RESCs (2.1 percent), Public Charter Schools (1.1 percent) and State Districts (0.8 percent). While the largest numeric increases over the last five years were in the 30 Alliance Districts (1,232) and Other LEAs (280), the RESCs, Public Charter Schools and State Districts all doubled their number of these students. The percentage of all ELs who have also been identified for special education services was highest in the RESCs (25.2 percent) followed by the 30 Alliance Districts (18.5 percent), Public Charter Schools (16.1 percent) Other LEAs (15.7 percent) and State Districts (13.6 percent). The number of ELs with primary disabilities of autism and ADD/ADHD more than doubled in the 30 Alliance Districts and the RESCs. Overall, ELs identified for special education were more likely than other special education students to be eligible for free or reduced-priced meals (84.3 percent versus 46.3 percent) and this was true across all the district categories.

### School Disciplinary Incidents

For the 2013–14 school year, the suspension/expulsion rate was higher for ELs than for all students (10.6 percent versus 7.5 percent), meaning that a higher percentage of all ELs received at least one of these sanctions than all students. The EL suspension/expulsion rate was, however, lower than for other historically underperforming ESEA subgroups such as Hispanics (11.9 percent), special education students (13.9 percent) and African-Americans (17.3 percent). The suspension/expulsion rates for the 90 districts with a rate for ELs ranged from 0.9 percent to 40.9 percent. Thirty-one districts had a rate above the statewide rate for all students (7.5 percent). ELs were expelled or suspended at a higher rate than the statewide average in elementary school (K–5: 3.9 percent versus 3.2 percent), middle school (20.6 percent versus 10.1 percent) or high school (24.3 percent versus 12.3 percent). While ELs were 5.9 percent of all K–12 students in the 2013–14 school year, they were 8.6 percent of all students cited for a disciplinary incident.

Among ELs that received an in-school suspension (ISS), school policy violations (82.8 percent) were the overwhelming majority of school disciplinary incidents (table 7). In-school suspensions for school policy violations averaged 1.1 days sanctioned per incident. The most common school policy violations included skipping class (20.2 percent), disruptive behavior (16.6 percent), insubordination/disrespect (15.7

**TABLE 7: Types of Disciplinary Incidents for In-School Suspensions and Out-of-School Suspensions for ELs with Average Days Sanctioned per Incident, 2013–14**

Incident Type	In-School Suspension		Out-of-School Suspension	
	Percentage	Average Days Sanctioned	Percentage	Average Days Sanctioned
School policy violations	82.8%	1.1	51.6%	2.1
Fighting/battery	5.9%	1.7	22.8%	4.2
Physical/verbal confrontation	5.2%	1.6	11.3%	3.7
Personally threatening behavior	3.0%	1.6	6.0%	3.9
Other	3.1%	2.3	8.3%	6.7
Total	100.0%	–	100.0%	–

percent) and failure to attend a detention or an ISS. Fighting/battery (5.9 percent) and physical/verbal confrontations (5.2 percent) were other prominent types of disciplinary incidents that resulted in an ISS for ELs. Education provided during ISSs included assignments sent to the ISS room (51.8 percent) and homework only (4.9 percent), while 40.6 percent were associated without any education provided.

As with ISS, school policy violations (51.6 percent) were also the majority of disciplinary incidents for out-of-school suspensions (OSS). However, fighting/battery (22.8 percent), physical/verbal confrontation (11.3 percent) and personally threatening behavior were more significant types of disciplinary incidents for OSSs. They also averaged more days sanctioned. ELs did not receive any education in 46.4 percent of OSSs and in 45.3 percent they only received their homework.

The prevalence of school policy violations and other types of incidents varied by grade. School policy violations accounted for a smaller share of ISSs for primary school ELs (grades K–5: 51.5 percent) than for those in middle school (75.5 percent) and high school (93.6 percent). They were also a smaller percentage for OSSs for primary school ELs (33.3 percent) than middle school (44.2 percent) and high school (65.9 percent). Only 21 percent of all ELs were in high school but they accounted for 63.3 percent of school policy incidents. Fighting/battery was a larger percentage of incidents for primary school ELs for both ISSs and OSSs (21.9 percent and 35.6 percent) than for those in middle school (8.4 percent and 27.9 percent) and high school (1.1 percent and 12.9 percent). This was also true for physical/verbal confrontations: primary school (14.5 percent and 14.7 percent), middle school (7 percent and 11.6 percent) and high school (2.1 percent and 9.4 percent).

Expulsions were a smaller share of sanctions for ELs (0.5 percent) than for non-ELs (0.7 percent). For ELs, the most prevalent types of incidents included weapons (28.8 percent), fighting and drugs/alcohol (both 21.2 percent).

Among ELs who were also identified for special education, 19.5 percent received either an ISS or OSS for a disciplinary incident compared with 14.4 percent of non-EL special education students (table 8). In fact, 30.6 percent of all ELs that received an ISS or OSS were students with disabilities compared with 23.2 percent among non-EL students. Students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) accounted for 15.1 percent of all ELs that received an ISS or OSS, followed by ADD/ADHD (5.9 percent) and speech and language impairment (2.7 percent). For nearly all special education primary disabilities, ELs were more likely to have received either an ISS or OSS than non-EL special education students. Nearly half of all ELs with emotional disturbance received an ISS or OSS as were 37.2 percent of those with ADD/ADHD, 33.3 percent of those with a traumatic brain injury and 30.8 percent of those with a visual impairment. These percentages were more than 10 per-

centage points higher than for special education students who were not ELs. For ELs identified for special education, 81.2 percent of in-school suspensions were for school policy violations, but they only accounted for 52.1 percent of out-of-school suspensions as fighting/battery (23.4 percent), physical/verbal confrontations (10.2 percent) and personally threatening behavior (6.5 percent) were more prevalent types of incidents. Few ELs and non-ELs identified for special education were expelled (0.3 percent for both). Weapons and drugs/alcohol were the most prevalent types of incidents associated with expulsions.

All ELs are federally mandated to participate in an annual assessment of their English language proficiency. Only 37.2 percent of ELs who were either suspended or expelled demonstrated progress in English language acquisition compared with 59.4 percent for all ELs. While 25.9 percent of all ELs achieved proficiency or better in 2014, this percentage was only 18.3 percent of ELs that were suspended or expelled. Furthermore, fewer of these latter ELs achieved proficiency or better on the subject subtests: listening (25 percent versus 30.5 percent for all ELs), speaking (44.8 percent versus 47.1 percent), writing (19.9 versus

**TABLE 8: Percentage of Students with Disabilities by EL Status That Received an In-School Suspension or Out-of-School Suspension, 2013–14**

Incident Type	EL	Not EL
Emotional disturbance	44.1%	33.4%
ADD/ADHD	37.2%	25.6%
Traumatic brain injury	33.3%	14.0%
Visual impairment	30.8%	8.6%
Other health impairment	22.7%	15.2%
Specific learning disabilities	22.6%	14.9%
Intellectually disabled	14.4%	7.5%
Multiple disabilities	11.3%	5.1%
Autism	7.8%	4.6%
Speech/language impairment	7.6%	6.3%
Hearing impairment	5.1%	4.1%
Developmental delay	2.9%	2.8%
Deaf-blindness	0.0%	0.0%
Orthopedic impairment	0.0%	4.9%
All students with disabilities	19.5%	14.4%



22.1 percent) and reading (12.1 percent versus 24.7 percent). These disparities exist across all grade bands. For example, fewer ELs cited for a disciplinary incident achieved proficiency or better on reading than for all ELs in kindergarten to grade 5 (13.9 percent versus 27.7 percent), grades 6 through 8 (14.8 percent versus 24.5 percent) and in high school (8.9 percent versus 14.5 percent).

It is important to note that many ELs have fled civic disorder and natural disasters and may have post-traumatic stress disorder. They may also have different cultural and social norms and come from situations where access to the educational system may be limited or nonexistent. Heightened cultural awareness by school and district staff will help these ELs' social and academic transitions and, consequently, may reduce their disciplinary incidents. The availability and appropriate provision of mental health and social work services may also help diminish disciplinary incidents among ELs.

### English Language Proficiency (ELP) Assessment

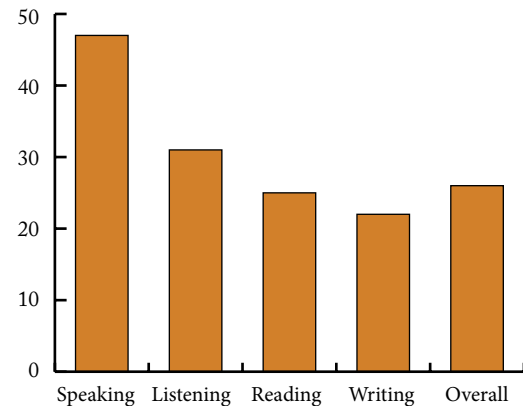
Under NCLB, the English language proficiency of all ELs must be assessed annually, including those whose parents refused English language services. In Connecticut, the mandated assessment instrument is the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) Links, which districts administer between January and mid-March. From the 2005–06 school year through the 2012–13 school year, LAS Links Forms A or B were administered in alternating years. These assessments were designed primarily to assess ELs' acquisition of basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS). Beginning with the 2013–14 school year, the CSDE selected LAS Links Form C as the new instrument for the ELP assessment. Form C aligns more closely with the academic demands of the Common Core State Standards. It is designed to measure ELs' ability to interact with academic context-based vocabulary without relying on the student's underlying subject matter knowledge. Thus, it is a better instrument for measuring cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), which is a key aspect of language acquisition and essential for academic success. Beginning in the 2013–14 school year, all assessments were to be scored by the test publisher and LEAs had the option of online testing for ELs in grades 3 through 12.

In the 2013–14 school year, 97 percent of ELs who were in public LEAs during the spring testing period took the LAS Links Form C and 96.1 percent completed it. Among those who completed the LAS Links in 2014 and had at least one prior overall score on LAS Links Forms A or B, 59.4 percent made progress in their English language acquisition, meaning that they increased their overall test scores from their prior assessment. This is lower than the percentage of ELs who demonstrated progress from the 2011–12 school year to the 2012–13 school year on Forms A and B (83.3 percent). Although forms A, B and C are on the same scale, the lower percentage of ELs who made progress in 2014 highlighted the increased rigor of Form C. Form C is more aligned with the Common Core standards and reflects the increased rigor in instruction across content areas. District educators and administrators must continue to respond to the increased rigor of both the Common Core Standards and the ELP assessment. The CSDE continues to support these instructional changes for ELs by providing ongoing professional development and technical assistance for bilingual, TESOL and general education teachers.

Among ELs who completed the 2014 LAS Links, 25.9 percent achieved an overall level of proficiency or advanced, down from 43.9 percent in 2013. The overall scale score used to determine the overall level is an average of the four subject subtests: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

There was variation in the percentages of all ELs that achieved overall proficiency (25.9 percent) or proficiency on each of the subtests (figure

**FIGURE 5:**  
Percentage of ELs Proficient or Advanced on each LAS Links Subtest and Overall, School Year 2013–14



5). More ELs were proficient in speaking (47.1 percent) than in listening (30.5 percent), reading (24.7 percent) and writing (22.1 percent).

Because the overall scale score is an average, an EL may achieve overall proficiency and yet not have reached proficiency in one or more of the subtests. Among ELs who achieved overall proficiency in the 2013–14 school year, only 25.4 percent also attained proficiency or better on each of the four subtests. In fact, 32 percent of ELs who attained an overall level of proficiency or better were proficient on only two or fewer subtests. Eighty-seven percent of these ELs attained proficiency or better in speaking, 70.7 percent in listening, 68.1 percent in reading and 63.4 percent in writing. Therefore, it is important to remember that although ELs may achieve overall proficiency or better on the LAS Links, they still may need support in becoming proficient in academic domains such as reading and writing that are critical to their future success in mainstream classrooms.

ELs identified for special education were less likely than others to achieve overall proficiency (12.1 percent versus 28.4 percent), and ELs eligible for free or reduced-price meals were also less likely than other ELs (24.9 percent versus 33.6 percent). ELs in Other LEAs were the most likely to attain overall proficiency (38.4 percent) followed by Public Charter Schools (37.2 percent), State Districts (36 percent), RESCs (26.8 percent) and the Alliance Districts (22.4 percent).

The LAS Links is organized in grade bands and, as a result, students in different grades who are within the same band take the same assessment. ELs in middle school (grades 6–8) had the highest percentage that attained overall proficiency (36.1 percent) followed by those in grades 4–5 (33.3 percent), ELs in high school (24.6 percent), ELs in grades 2–3 (23.1 percent) and finally those in kindergarten and first grade (18.5 percent). These percentages likely reflect in part the length of service time that ELs have received as this is a key factor in language proficiency.<sup>24</sup> There were only small percentages of ELs in grades K–1 (8.2 percent) and grades 2–3 (16.4 percent) that were proficient or better on the writing subtest. The lowest percentages of proficient ELs in grades 6–8 (24.5 percent) and high school (14.5 percent) were for the reading subtest.

### The CSDE's English Mastery Standard

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the ESEA established the fundamental right of ELs to English language services until they attain English proficiency so that they will ultimately have the ability to master the same academic content as their student peers. National research suggests that oral proficiency (BICS—basic interpersonal

communication skills) takes three to five years and academic English proficiency (CALP—cognitive academic language proficiency) may take four to seven years.<sup>25</sup> It is important to remember that individual ELs will vary in their time to attain English language proficiency. Several factors may influence an individual ELs trajectory to English proficiency. Studies suggest that ELs who have had prior formal education in their native language tend to acquire English proficiency more quickly. Post-traumatic stress disorder, disabilities, the degree of social and cultural dislocation, age at immigration, and the quality of ESL services may also affect individual ELs' rate of English language acquisition. It is also important to note that both ESL and regular classroom teachers influence ELs' English language development.

As part of NCLB, each state developed its own English mastery standard or the academic criteria that all ELs must demonstrate before they can exit EL status and ESL/bilingual services. Prior to the 2013–14 school year, the CSDE's grade-specific mastery standard combined performance on both the LAS Links and a test of academic mastery such as the Direct Reading Assessment 2 (DRA 2: grades K–2), the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT: grades 3–9) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT: grades 10–12). In the 2013–14 school year, LEAs chose to administer either the CMT and/or CAPT or participate in the Smarter Balanced pilot. As a result, the English mastery standard remained the same for ELs in districts that gave the legacy assessments and it also remained unchanged for ELs in grades K–2 in the districts that participated in the Smarter Balanced field test. For ELs in grades 3–12 in the Smarter Balanced districts, the mastery criterion was an overall level of advanced on the LAS Links. Beginning with the 2014–15 school year, the mastery standard for all ELs will be an overall level of proficiency or better and proficiency or better on the reading and writing subtests of the LAS Links. The new and more rigorous English mastery standard seeks to ensure that ELs who exit EL status have the necessary oral and academic skills so that they can achieve academic mastery in the regular classroom without language supports. In the 2013–14 school year, 1,918 ELs achieved English mastery, which was 5.9 percent of all ELs at the time of the LAS Links assessment. While this was 52.2 percent fewer than the previous year (4,014 or 12.7 percent), this decline could have been anticipated given the increased rigor of the LAS Links Form C and the higher exit criterion for ELs in grades 3–12 in the Smarter Balanced districts. It also reflects the change from LAS Links Form B in 2013 to Form C, which is more aligned with the Common Core and included more academic concepts and content.

Among ELs who attained English mastery, 67.4 percent were in grades K–2 and only 5.8 percent in high school. ELs in grades K–2 were the most likely to attain mastery (figure 6: 10.4 percent) while high school students were the least likely (1.7 percent). This may in part be related to the nature of exit criterion at the different grade levels prior to the 2014–15 school year. Still, the number of ELs who attained mastery declined at all grade bands: K–2 (31.5 percent), grades 3–5 (74 percent), grades 6–8 (61.5 percent) and high school (75.8 percent). At each grade level, the percentage of ELs who achieved English mastery declined from 2013 to 2014.

ELs who were also identified as students with disabilities were less likely to reach mastery compared with all other ELs (1.2 percent versus 6.8 percent). Similarly, fewer ELs who were eligible for free or reduced-price meals attained mastery (4.9 percent versus 10.6 percent).

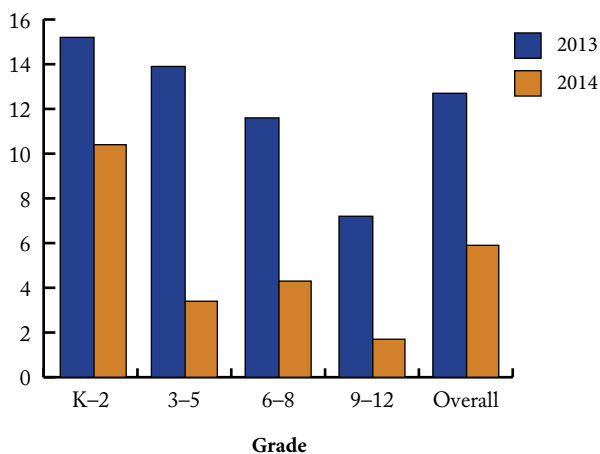
The Alliance Districts accounted for 61 percent of the ELs that achieved mastery and Other LEAs for a further 37 percent. ELs in the Other LEAs were most likely to reach mastery (11.1 percent), followed by Public Charter Schools (7.4 percent), the Alliance Districts (4.7 percent), RESCs (2.5 percent) and State Districts (0.7 percent). State district ELs were all Connecticut Technical High School students and their exit criterion was an overall score of advanced on the LAS Links.

The Alliance Districts and the RESCs had among the lowest percentages of ELs who achieved English mastery in 2014. They had higher percentages of special education students and those eligible for free or reduced-priced meals (Alliance Districts 18.5 and 82.9 percent, and RESCs 25.2 percent and 80.5 percent).

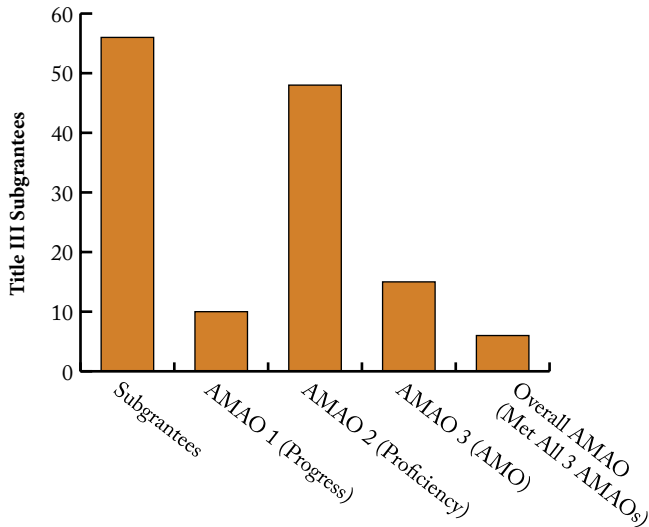
### Title III Accountability

In the 2013–14 school year, there were 56 Title III subgrantees. These included the larger independent districts that have enough ELs to qualify for grants of \$10,000 or more and smaller districts that do not individually qualify for grants of this size and therefore must form consortia to receive Title III funds. The 10 Title III consortia and 46 independent districts are held accountable under Title III regulations, as their ELs must meet Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs). These AMAOs include the percentage of ELs participating in bilingual education or receiving ESL services that made progress in English language acquisition (AMAO 1 and the percentage of these who attained English language proficiency (AMAO 2). In Connecticut, AMAO 1 and AMAO 2 are measured by the LAS Links during the annual English language proficiency assessment. The CSDE establishes the targets for AMAO 1 and AMAO 2 as part of its ESEA accountability workbook.<sup>26</sup> In addition to AMAO 1 and AMAO 2, Title III regulations stipulate that subgrantees are held accountable for the adequate yearly progress (AYP—ESEA accountability) of their EL subgroups (AMAO 3). Connecticut's 2012 ESEA Flexibility Agreement changed its ESEA accountability from the AYP system of single subject-specific targets for all districts, schools and their subgroups to a set of annual individualized growth targets that all student groups including ELs must attain (Annual Measurable Objectives, i.e., AMOs). From 2012 through 2013, AMAO 3 required that EL subgroups in Title III subgrantees meet their annual District Performance Index (DPI) growth targets for math and reading on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT—grades 3–8) and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT—grade 10). The district's EL subgroup also had to meet the 95 percent participation rate goal on these math and reading assessments. In addition, the subgrantees' EL subgroups were required to meet their annual four-year cohort and holding-power graduation rate targets. Title III subgrantees had to meet all these criteria to achieve AMAO 3. They also must achieve all three AMAOs to be considered to have made their overall AMAOs.

**FIGURE 6:**  
Percentage of ELs Who Attained English Mastery by Grade,  
School Year 2012–13 and 2013–14



**FIGURE 7:**  
Title III Subgrantee AMAO Performance,  
School Year 2013–14



The 2013–14 school year was a year of transition for ESEA accountability and this affected AMAO 3. Districts were allowed either to administer the CMT/CAPT or to participate in the Smarter Balanced assessment field test. AMAO 3 requirements for the small number of Title III subgrantees that administered the CMT/CAPT remained unchanged, specifically attaining the EL subgroup math and reading DPI targets; meeting the 95 percent participation rate goal; and achieving EL subgroup graduation rate targets. For subgrantees that participated in the Smarter Balanced pilot, AMAO 3 requirements included the 95 percent participation goal on the Smarter Balanced math and English language arts (ELA) assessments and meeting EL subgroup graduation rate targets.

Among the 56 Title III subgrantees in the 2013–14 school year, 10 met or exceeded the AMAO 1 target, which was 80 percent of ELs making progress in English language acquisition, and 48 met the AMAO 2 target, which was 30 percent of ELs attaining English language proficiency as measured by LAS Links Form C (figure 7). These results are a sharp departure from prior years when typically all or nearly all subgrantees met their AMAO 1 and AMAO 2 targets. As previously noted, LAS Links Form C is a more academically rigorous assessment than prior versions of the LAS Links. In addition, the publisher CTB scored nearly all exams for the first time and many students took the exam online.

In the 2013–14 school year, 15 subgrantees achieved AMAO 3, all of whom participated in the Smarter Balanced field test. This was significantly more than the prior year (five) when all districts administered the CMT/CAPT and had to meet EL subgroup DPI growth targets. In the final year that AYP was used to determine AMAO 3 (2011–12), 31 districts made AMAO 3. This decrease resulted from the more rigorous accountability system created by the 2012 ESEA Flexibility Agreement. Specifically, a key difference was that in the AYP system the student threshold for calculating accountability measures was 40, and many Title III subgrantees EL subgroups fell below this. As a result, they “made” AMAO 3 by default. In the accountability system created by the 2012 ESEA Flexibility agreement, the threshold was lowered to 20 students and more EL subgroups were included in the accountability system.

Six subgrantees met all three AMAOs and therefore made Overall AMAO. All these were independent districts that participated in the Smarter Balanced field test. None of them were Alliance or low-incidence districts.

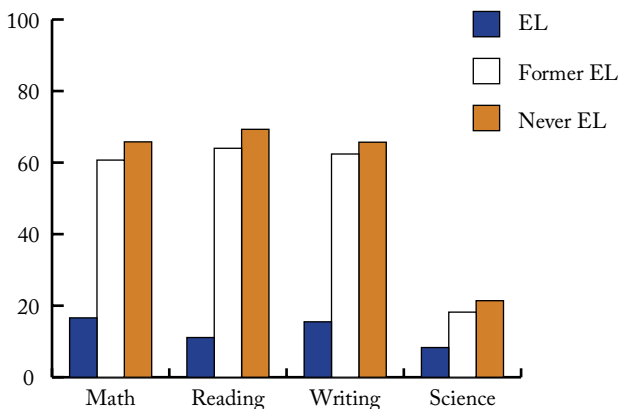
Title III accountability includes corrective actions to be implemented by subgrantees that do not achieve AMAO. Parental notification that the district or consortium did not make AMAO is always required. Other corrective actions vary by the number of consecutive years that the Title III subgrantees have not achieved AMAO. These actions include the creation or amendment of an improvement plan, modification of curriculum or programs, and even personnel replacement. The CSDE’s Academic Office provides technical assistance to LEAs with regard to EL instruction, support services and the development of improvement plans.

**ESEA Accountability**

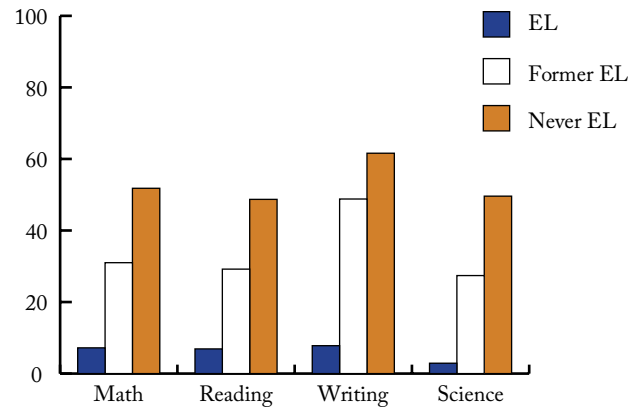
The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 requires all children, including ELs, to attain high academic standards and demonstrate proficiency in mathematics and English language arts. Until the 2013–14 school year, the ESEA assessments were the CMT (grades 3 through 8) and CAPT (grade 10). In the 2014–15 school year, LEAs had the choice to either continue administering the CMT and CAPT or to participate in the Smarter Balanced field test (grades 3–8 and 11). In the 2014–15 school year, all LEAs will administer the Smarter Balanced assessment. Academic mastery assessments pose a significant challenge to ELs as they are in the process of acquiring cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), which may take four to seven years.<sup>27</sup>

Although the CMT and CAPT have been retired, their 2012–13 administration were the most recent academic mastery assessments that all districts participated in, and their results illustrate the significant

**FIGURE 8:**  
Percentage of Current ELs, Former ELs and Students Who  
Were Never an EL Achieving Goal or Better, CMT 2013



**FIGURE 9:**  
Percentage of Current ELs, Former ELs and Students Who  
Were Never an EL Achieving Goal or Better, CAPT 2013



gap between ELs and their peers. Fewer than 20 percent of students who were ELs at the time of testing attained the target of goal level or better on any of the CMT (figure 8) or CAPT subtests (figure 9). As a result, there were gaps of around 50 percentage points of those who attained goal level or better between ELs and those who were never an EL on CMT math (16.6 percent versus 65.8 percent), reading (11.1 percent versus 69.3 percent) and writing (15.5 percent versus 65.7 percent). The CAPT illuminated similar gaps between ELs and those who were never an EL: math (7.2 percent versus 51.8 percent); reading (6.8 percent versus 48.7 percent); writing (7.8 percent versus 61.6 percent); and science (2.9 percent versus 49.8 percent).

Most ELs scored either below basic or basic on CMT math (57.6 percent), reading (63.8 percent), and science (73 percent); the exception to this was writing (47.4 percent). There were similar results for ELs on the CAPT: math (67.1 percent); reading (50.4 percent); science (70.7 percent); and the exception was again writing (43.2 percent).

It is important to note the percentages of former ELs (i.e., ELs that attained English mastery) that achieved goal level or better on the 2013 CMT (figure 8) were similar to those for students who were never an EL. Though comparable, their percentages at goal or better were still 3 to 5 points lower on the CMT. However, the gaps between former ELs and students who were never an EL on 2013 CAPT (figure 9) were more sizable: math (31 percent versus 51.8), reading (29.2 percent versus 48.7 percent), writing (48.8 percent versus 61.6 percent) and science (27.4 percent versus 49.8 percent).

#### Four-Year and Five-Year Cohort Graduation Rates

The four-year cohort graduation rate for ELs in the class of 2014 was 63 percent, which was a slight decline from the prior year (table 9). The only 2014-subgroup graduation rates that declined were for ELs and Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders. Furthermore, the 2014 cohort graduation rate for ELs was considerably lower than the rate for non-EL students (87.9 percent). This gap of more than 20 percentage points has persisted across the five cohorts for which rates have been calculated. Another consistent trend across the five cohorts was that EL graduation rates were lower than those for other historically underperforming ESEA student subgroups such as students with disabilities (SWD) and students eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

**TABLE 9: Four Year Cohort Graduation Rates for EL and Non-EL Students, 2010–14**

Student Group	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
EL	60.1%	59.4%	62.7%	63.8%	63.0%
Non-EL	82.7%	83.8%	85.9%	86.6%	87.9%
SWD	62.5%	62.4%	64.4%	64.7%	65.2%
Eligible for free lunch*	62.7%	62.5%	66.6%	68.6%	73.1%
All students	81.8%	82.7%	84.8%	85.5%	87.0%

\* The 2010 and 2011 cohorts include students who were eligible for reduced-price meals.

EL subgroups met their 2014 cohort graduation rate targets in four of 15 districts that had calculated rates and targets. District EL graduation rates ranged from 42.2 percent to 100 percent. EL subgroups met their 2013 cohort graduation targets in seven of the 23 schools that had calculated rates and targets. School EL graduation rates ranged from 35 percent to 87.1 percent.

In the 2014 cohort, 12.1 percent of ELs were still enrolled in public schools compared with just 5.4 percent of non-ELs. Other student groups with higher percentages of students that were still enrolled included students with disabilities (22.6 percent) and students eligible for free or reduced-price meals (9.2 percent). Students may be retained because they require extra time to be academically and socially prepared for their postsecondary education or career. This may be particularly true for the historically underperforming groups such as ELs. Reflecting this perspective, the five-year cohort graduation rate provides an extra year for LEAs to move students to graduation (table 10). A fifth year of high school may be particularly beneficial for some ELs, especially those who have interrupted formal education in their native country. ELs are in the process of developing BICS and CALP, and an extra year provides them with more time to develop a higher level of English proficiency while meeting all the requirements for graduation with a Connecticut diploma.

**TABLE 10: Five Year Cohort Graduation Rates for EL and Non-EL Students, 2012**

Student Group	Rate
EL	70.4%
Non-EL	88.3%
SWD	72.0%
Eligible for free lunch	71.9%
All students	87.5%

#### Addressing the Achievement Gap

This bulletin has highlighted the significant achievement gap between ELs and their peers. With the increased dispersion of ELs throughout Connecticut, narrowing this gap poses a significant challenge to an increasing number of LEAs. While effective bilingual and ESL programs are essential, an important approach to narrowing the achievement gap should focus on the general education classroom, where EL students receive most of their instruction. ELs in general education classrooms need to receive differentiated instruction and ongoing support so they may simultaneously acquire academic vocabulary and content, as well as English language skills. The Connecticut State Board of Education's 2010 adoption of the Connecticut Core Standards (CCS) and the CSDE's efforts to support local implementation of the standards can help facilitate these goals. Throughout the adoption, transition and implementation of the CCS, the CSDE has solicited the involvement of EL stakeholders to address the unique needs of ELs. As part of the CCS support to districts, the CSDE has been training general educators and administrators as well as other district staff in effective instructional strategies for ELs, including making academic content comprehensible to these students. In spring 2015, the CSDE release new Connecticut English Language Proficiency (CELP) draft standards that are aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards. They were reviewed by CSDE staff and the State Board of Education's Committee on Academic Standards and Assessments. These CELP standards will be presented to the State Board for approval in fall 2015.

To address teacher shortages, the CSDE created the Alternate Route to Certification for Teachers of English Language Learners (ARCTELL) program, which includes courses and fieldwork related to teaching ELs. The certified teachers who complete this program become cross-endorsed in either bilingual education or TESOL. This is potentially very valuable for ELs and particularly their mastery of academic

content, as it brings experienced teachers with content knowledge into ESL and bilingual education.

Although this bulletin has examined Connecticut's ELs as a group and contrasted them with other students to highlight their unique characteristics, it is important to remember that ELs are themselves a heterogeneous group of individual students with varying socio-cultural backgrounds and academic experiences. Some ELs have experienced civic disorder, warfare or natural disasters and may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. ELs also vary in their previous exposure to both conversational and academic English. Another crucial difference is their level of native language competence. Some ELs have had limited, irregular or no access to education before enrolling in the U.S. school system.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, ELs who are proficient in their native language may have an advantage in developing English language proficiency. Given all these potential differences among ELs, some educators advocate differentiation or individualization of ESL instruction, assessment and expectations regarding the pace of student achievement.<sup>29</sup> In addition to building basic conversational and social skills, instruction of ELs must foster the acquisition of academic English language skills because these are essential for long-term academic success and closing the achievement gap.<sup>30</sup>

## Endnotes

1. U.S. Department of Education: Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) as amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). Notice of Final Interpretation, Federal Register (V: 73 N: 202) October 17, 2008.
2. Connecticut State Board of Education (2010). *Position Statement on the Education of Students Who Are English Language Learners*.
3. Total for the 2010–11 school year combines students with a language code of either Chinese (2,216) or Mandarin (182). Chinese was discontinued as a language code as of the October 2011 PSIS collection, i.e. for the 2011–12 school year. As a result, the number of students with a dominant language of Mandarin increased from 182 students in October 2010 to 1,952 students in October 2011. Similarly, the number of Cantonese speakers increased from 104 to 582.
4. The CSDE recommends a three-question home language survey to determine the dominant language, including the first language spoken by the student; the primary language spoken by the student at home; and the primary language spoken by the parent(s) or guardian(s) at home. The dominant language is the answer to two of these questions. LEAs may also use student observation and/or testing to make the final determination of the dominant language. The identification procedure should be done within 30 days for students who have been enrolled since the beginning of the school year and within two weeks for those who transferred in after the beginning of the school year.
5. United States Department of Education. (2014) *Questions and Answers Regarding Inclusion of English Language Proficiency Assessments and Title III Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives*.
6. Cummins, J. (1980). The cross-lingual dimensions of language proficiency: Implications for bilingual education and the optimal age issue. *TESOL Quarterly* 14(2).
7. Hakuta, K., Butler, Y.G., & Witt, D. (2000). *How long does it take English learners to reach proficiency?* Santa Barbara: University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute Policy Report.
8. Scarcella, R. (2003). *Academic English: A Conceptual Framework*. Technical Reports, University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute, UC Berkeley.
9. The bilingual grant is calculated based on the number of ELs in the October Public School Information System (PSIS) collection that were eligible for bilingual education. ELs are no longer eligible for bilingual education after they have participated in a transitional bilingual education program for 30 months. ELs who have exhausted their eligibility and who have yet to meet the CSDE's English mastery standard receive language transition support services (LTSS). There are differences in the number of eligible ELs used to calculate the grant and the number of ELs who participate in a bilingual program the following year as some graduate, transfer and attain English language mastery. Similarly, students with fewer than 30 months until graduation do not participate in bilingual education programs but receive ESL services.
10. Schools identified for a bilingual program are required to provide it even if they no longer have 20 ELs speaking the same language.
11. Dual Language and Arts Magnet Middle School website, Principal's Corner. <http://www.languagesandartsmagnetmiddle.org/>.
12. The certification shortage area designation provides LEAs with greater flexibility to staff positions in shortage areas. Teachers in shortage areas may qualify for student loan deferral or forgiveness or mortgage assistance through CHFA, the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority.
13. See footnote 3.
14. The grade bands in this report are those that structure the LAS Links, Connecticut's Title III English language proficiency assessment.
15. The Education Reform Alliance Districts include Bridgeport, East Hartford, Hartford, Meriden, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Norwich, Waterbury, and Windham. These were the lowest performing districts under the ESEA accountability system.
16. In addition to the 10 Education Reform Districts, the Alliance Districts include Ansonia, Bloomfield, Bristol, Danbury, Derby, East Haven, East Windsor, Hamden, Killingly, Manchester, Middletown, Naugatuck, Norwalk, Putnam, Stamford, Vernon, West Haven, Winchester, Windsor and Windsor Locks. These are among the 30 lowest-performing districts under the ESEA accountability system.
17. The 80 schools included Norwich Free Academy, which is not an Alliance District; however, it is the designated high school for most Norwich public schools, which is both an Education Reform and an Alliance District.
18. The CSDE stresses that ESL instruction is part of the Tier I core instruction and only those EL students for whom Tier I and II interventions have failed should be referred for Tier III services and potentially referred for special education. Each tier provides supports of increasing intensity. See CSDE SRBI document [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/pressroom/SRBI\\_full.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/pressroom/SRBI_full.pdf).
19. See footnote 5, USED citing EDFacts Data Warehouse, OMB #1875-0240: IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environment Collection, 201, 2012.
20. See footnote 5, USED citing SY 2012–13 EDFacts Data Group 123.
21. Connecticut Administrators of Programs for English Language Learners (CAPELL). (2011). *English Language Learners and Special Education: A Resource Handbook*. <http://www.capellct.org/>.
22. USED, see footnote 5.
23. USED, see footnote 5.
24. Hakuta, et al., see footnote 7.
25. Collier, V. and Thomas, W. (2002). *A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement*. Final Reports, Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, UC Berkeley. Gottlieb, M. (2006). *Assessing English Language Learners: Bridges from Language Proficiency to Academic Achievement*. Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA. Hakuta, et al. see footnote 7.
26. Every five years, the CSDE files an Accountability Plan with the U.S. Department of Education that establishes Title III Annual Measurable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs). In the 2014–15 school year, the targets were 80 percent of ELs making progress (i.e., increasing) their overall ELP score (AMAO 1) and 30 percent of ELs attaining English language proficiency (AMAO 2). The CSDE annually calculates AMAOs for all Title III subgrantees. The CSDE annually reports the AMAO performance of its subgrantees and ELP results for all ELs.
27. Hakuta, et al. see footnote 7.
28. Gottlieb, see footnote 25.

29. Gottlieb, see footnote 25.

30. Scarcella, see footnote 8.

**Data Notes:** General public school data and ELL figures, program statistics and demographics are from the Public School Information System (PSIS) October collections. Certification shortage area information is from the ED 156 Fall Hiring Survey. Special education data are from the Special Education Data Application and Collection (SEDAC). School discipline data are from the ED 166 Disciplinary Offense collection. LAS Links and English mastery results are from the LAS Links data collections. CMT and CAPT data are from the CSDE's official assessment files.

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