

Purpose. English language learners (ELLs) are expected to exit the language program after they have achieved academic fluency in English, based on the recommendation of the campus-based Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) and as determined by performance on state-mandated or approved assessments for English proficiency and content-area knowledge. Research has shown that the average ELL took approximately 5 to 7 years to acquire grade-level, academic English (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Thomas & Collier, 1997). ELLs who do not exit within this time frame are considered *long-term* ELLs (i.e., ELLs who are in the language program longer than generally expected). The Department of English Language Learners (DELL) requested research to investigate possible indicators for long-term ELLs that might be used in an early identification system.

Recommendation. Based on the preliminary analyses of this report, Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE) staff do not recommend an early identification system for long-term ELLs as presently defined by DELL administrators. Long-term ELLs were identified by the number of years they were in school in the United States prior to the fall of their current year and the first Austin Independent School District (AISD) grade level of enrollment (see technical note [1]). By using an indicator based on length of time in the language program, the group identified as long-term ELLs was diverse in academic and English language ability. The data suggest that this variation in ability could be related to factors beyond the student, such as exiting procedures at the campus level. The large variation, especially if related to school-level effects, would lead to an inaccurate tool for earlier identification of struggling long-term ELLs.

Policy Implication: To address long-term ELLs, administrators should develop two systems: (a) a system to flag potentially ready-to-exit ELLs that includes electronic documentation showing ELLs were assessed or reason denied exit, and (b) a system to flag ELLs struggling in English proficiency or in content areas to identify the need for earlier intervention services.

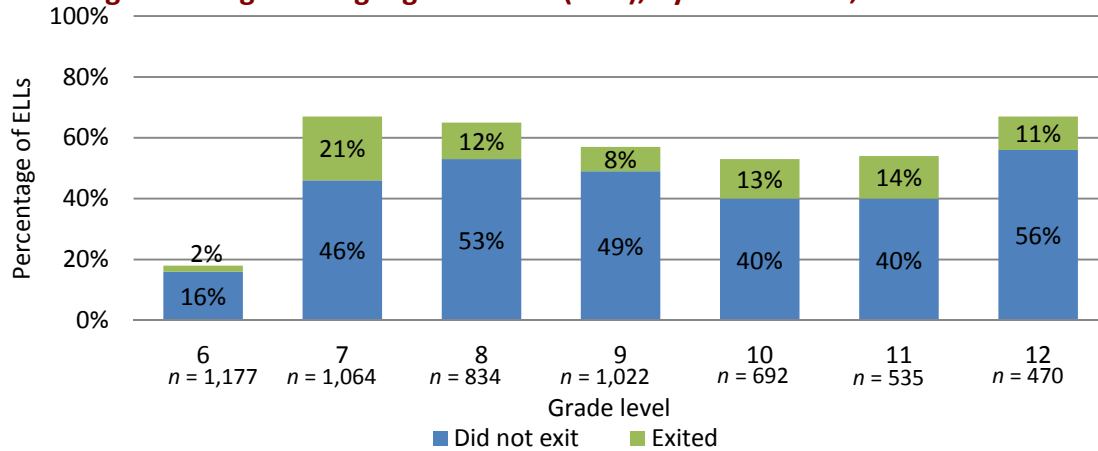
Long-term ELLs, by grade level. The largest percentages of long-term ELLs were in 7th and 12th grades for the 2010–2011 cohort (Figure 1), and the largest number of long-term ELLs was in 7th grade ($n = 709$). However, 7th grade also represented the grade level with the highest percentage of long-term ELLs exiting the program; long-term ELLs represented 73% of all 7th-grade exits. Thus, for the remaining analyses, DRE staff restricted the identification of long-term ELLs to ELLs who did not eventually exit the program in 2010–2011.



Key Characteristics of 2010–2011 Long-term ELLs

- Eighty-four percent entered AISD in early elementary (i.e., early education to 2nd grade).
- Twenty-five percent received special education services; 33% of high school long-term ELLs were in special education.
- Long-term ELLs were placed in special education in later grades than were other current ELLs.
- Nearly 3 out of 4 long-term ELLs in special education were diagnosed with a learning disability.
- Thirty-four percent repeated one or more grade levels.
- Fourteen percent ($n = 302$) of long-term ELLs grades 6–11 met the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) criteria to exit the language program.
- A greater percentage of long-term ELLs than of other current ELLs who did not exit the program passed reading, science, and writing TAKS.

Figure 1. Long-Term English Language Learners (ELLs), by Grade Level, 2010–2011



Source. Student records through 2010–2011

Note. Percentages are based on the total number of English language learners in grade (n) for Fall 2010.

Approximately five out of six long-term ELLs in 2010–2011 entered AISD in early elementary grades (i.e., 2nd grade or earlier; Table 1). Few long-term ELLs (5%) entered the district in secondary grade levels (i.e., few ELLs who had been enrolled in the United States for more than 5 years transferred from other Texas school districts).

Table 1. 2010–2011 Long-Term English Language Learners’ (ELL) AISD Grade-Level Entry Patterns

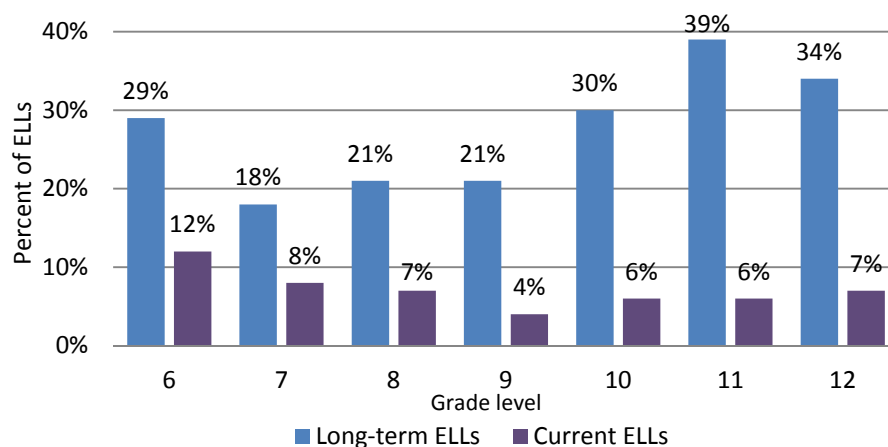
	Grade at AISD Entry														Total
	EE	Pre-K	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
6	13 7%	91 48%	45 24%	18 9%	6 3%	* *	13 7%	* *	5 3%	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	191
7	16 3%	314 65%	92 19%	37 8%	9 2%	5 1%	* *	* *	* *	8 2%	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	481
8	23 5%	241 55%	89 20%	28 6%	33 7%	7 2%	5 1%	* *	* *	9 2%	7 2%	0 0	0 0	0 0	442
9	23 5%	218 44%	87 17%	41 8%	40 8%	39 8%	15 3%	11 2%	8 2%	6 1%	8 2%	5 1%	0 0	0 0	501
10	14 5%	115 41%	36 13%	31 11%	17 6%	15 5%	22 8%	11 4%	9 3%	* *	* *	* *	11 4%	0 0	281
11	17 8%	77 35%	28 13%	17 8%	13 6%	8 4%	18 8%	19 9%	5 2%	8 3%	* *	7 3%	* *	* *	217
12	23 9%	95 36%	22 8%	18 7%	15 6%	13 5%	10 4%	25 10%	21 8%	12 5%	* *	10 4%	* *	* *	264
n	129	1,151	399	190	133	87	83	66	48	43	15	22	11	*	2,377
%	5%	48%	17%	8%	6%	4%	3%	3%	2%	2%	<1%	1%	<1%	*	100%
N	2,002					236			106			33			2,377
%	84%					10%			4%			1%			99%

Source. AISD records

* indicates redacted data with fewer than 5 students. First column represents students’ current grade level. Some percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding. Orange = AISD grade entry in early elementary–grade 2; blue = late elementary (i.e., grades 3–5); green = middle school (i.e., grades 6–8); and red = high school.

Special education. Five percent of long-term ELLs entered AISD through the Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD; i.e., early education [EE]), which provides special education services in English and in Spanish for children between the ages of 3 and 5 with developmental delays or other disabilities (Table 1). In 2010–2011, 25% of all long-term ELLs received special education services. Figure 2 provides the percentage of long-term ELLs and other current ELLs in special education according to grade level. At the high school level, nearly 1 in 3 long-term ELLs were in special education. It is possible some long-term ELLs were identified as needing special education services due to the number of years they had been in the language program without exiting (Figure 3). Long-term ELLs were first placed in special education at later grade levels than were other current ELLs. In 2010–2011, 74% of long-term ELLs in special education were primarily diagnosed with a learning disability, compared with 67% of current ELLs in special education who had that diagnosis ($p < .0567$).

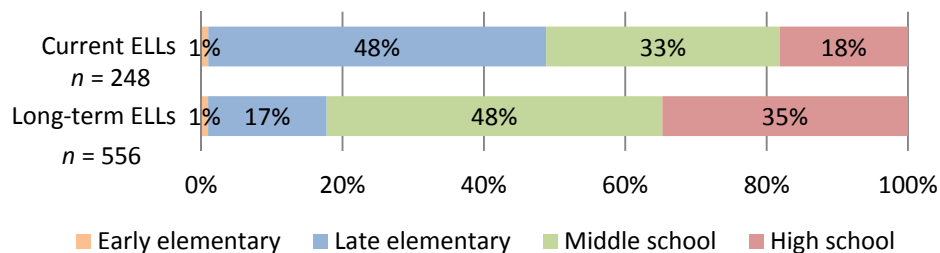
Figure 2. English Language Learners (ELLs) in Special Education, by Long-Term ELL Status and Grade Level, 2010–2011



Source. Student records through 2010–2011

Note. See technical note (2).

Figure 3. English Language Learners (ELLs) Placed in Special Education, by Long-Term ELL Status and School Level of Special Education Placement, 2010–2011

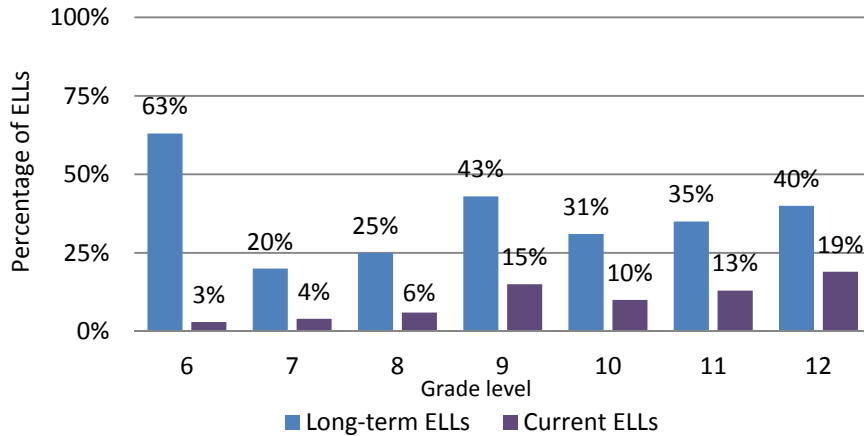


Source. AISD records

Note. Some percentages do not add to 100 due to rounding. *Orange* = AISD grade entry in early elementary (i.e., early elementary–grade 2); *blue* = late elementary entry (i.e., grades 3–5); *green* = entry in middle school (i.e., grades 6–8); and, *red* = entry in high school. Although 5% of long-term ELLs entered in early elementary, some no longer received special education services; thus, only 1% of long-term ELLs who were in special education in 2010–2011 were diagnosed in early elementary.

Grade retention. Thirty-four percent of 2010–2011 long-term ELLs ($n = 808$) repeated at least one grade level (kindergarten through 12th grade), and 12% of these long-term ELLs ($n = 100$) repeated more than one grade level.¹ Sixth and 9th grades had the highest percentage of long-term ELLs who had a history of grade retention (Figure 4). These grade levels also represented a dip in performance by ELLs in TELPAS (Brunner, 2011). First and ninth grades represented the grade levels most repeated by long-term ELLs (Figure 5).

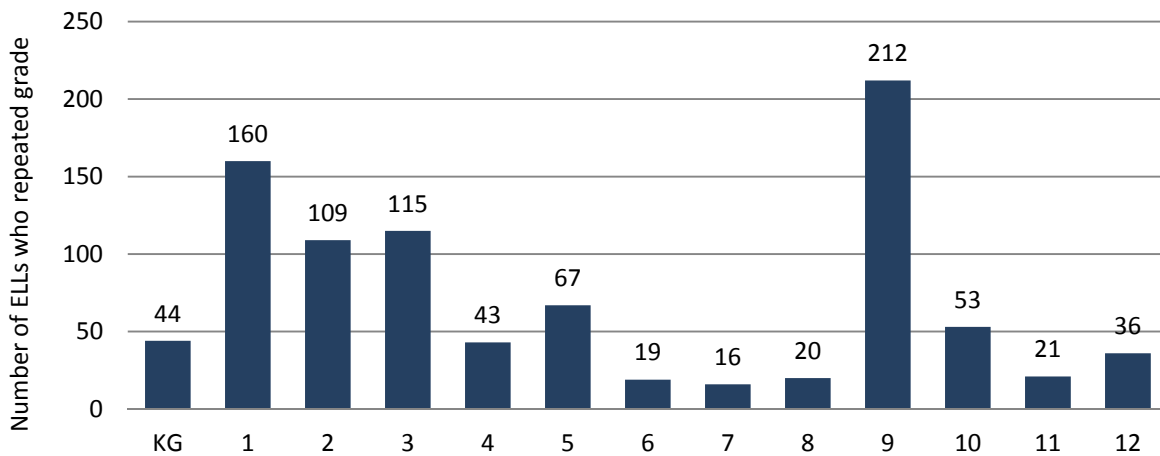
Figure 4. English Language Learners (ELLs) Who Repeated a Grade, by Long-Term ELL Status and Current Grade Level, 2010–2011



Source. Student records through 2010–2011

Note. Percentages are based on the number of current and long-term English language learners in a grade level for Fall 2010. See technical note (3).

Figure 5. Long-Term English Language Learners (ELLs) Who Repeated a Grade, by Repeated Grade Level, 2010–2011



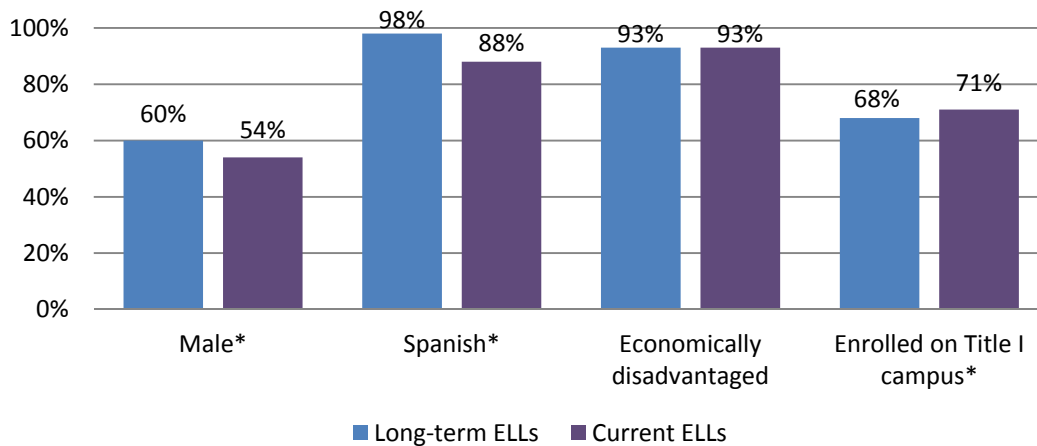
Source. Student records through 2010–2011

Other characteristics. Significantly more long-term ELLs than other current ELLs were males, were Spanish-

¹ The definition of long-term ELLs was based on years in the programs, and grade-level retention is related to an increase in duration a student is in school. These variables are correlated due to the nature of their construct, i.e., ELLs who were retained were more likely to be in the language program longer than ELLs in the same grade level who were not retained.

speaking, and were enrolled on a non-Title I campus (Figure 6).

Figure 6. English Language Learners' (ELLs) Characteristics, by Long-Term ELL Status, 2010–2011



Source. Student records through 2010–2011

* indicates a significant difference between long-term ELLs ($n = 2,377$) and current ELLs ($n = 3,417$). In Title I schools, at least 70% of the enrolled student qualify for free or reduce-priced lunch.

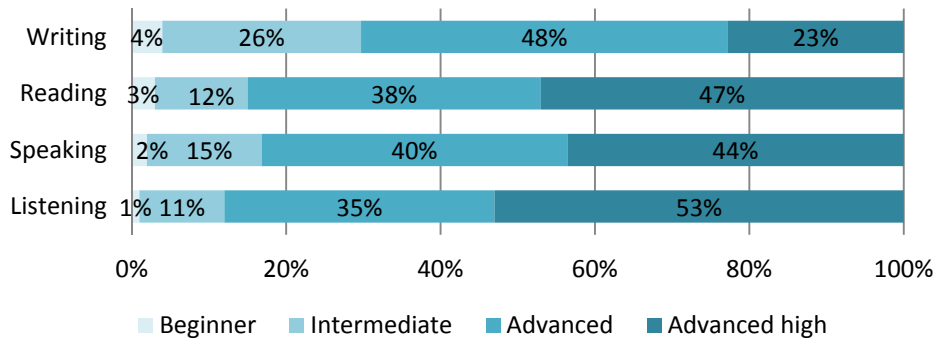
English proficiency. In Texas, ELLs' English proficiency is assessed using the TELPAS for kindergarten through 12th grade. Students are tested with the TELPAS annually to determine whether they have advanced sufficiently in their English language proficiency to exit out of Bilingual education (BE) and English as a second language (ESL) programs.

The four domains assessed by the TELPAS are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students receive a proficiency score and rating (i.e., *beginning*, *intermediate*, *advanced*, *advanced high*) on each domain. Students' scores on the TELPAS language domains are weighted in the following manner to create a composite score: listening 5%, speaking 5%, reading 75%, and writing 15%.

ELLs exiting BE/ESL services at the end of 3rd grade or later must meet the following requirements: (a) students must have passed the English language version of the reading/English language arts (ELA) TAKS, (b) students must have scored *advanced high* on the writing portion of the TELPAS or have passed the writing TAKS in English, and (c) students must have scored fluent in English speaking on the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) Links. Additionally, the campus LPAC and the students' parents must approve transitioning the student to all-English classes.

More than 80% of long-term ELLs who took the TELPAS in 2010–2011 and did not exit the language program scored an *advanced* or higher on the speaking section of TELPAS, and more than 80% scored *advanced* or higher on the reading section (Figure 7). Nearly a quarter (23%) scored *advanced high* in writing (Figure 7). Furthermore, of long-term ELLs with a TELPAS yearly progress measure ($n = 1,848$), 53% ($n = 988$) improved by one or more levels or remained at *advanced high*. Conversely, approximately 4% to 5% of long-term ELLs who took TELPAS and who exited in 2010–2011 ($n = 634$) did not score *advanced* or higher on TELPAS speaking or reading. Seventeen percent ($n = 96$) of 2010–2011 long-term exited ELLs with a TELPAS progress measure ($n = 572$) did not make yearly progress.

Figure 7. Long-Term English Language Learners’ (ELLs) Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) Results, 2010–2011 (n = 2,020)

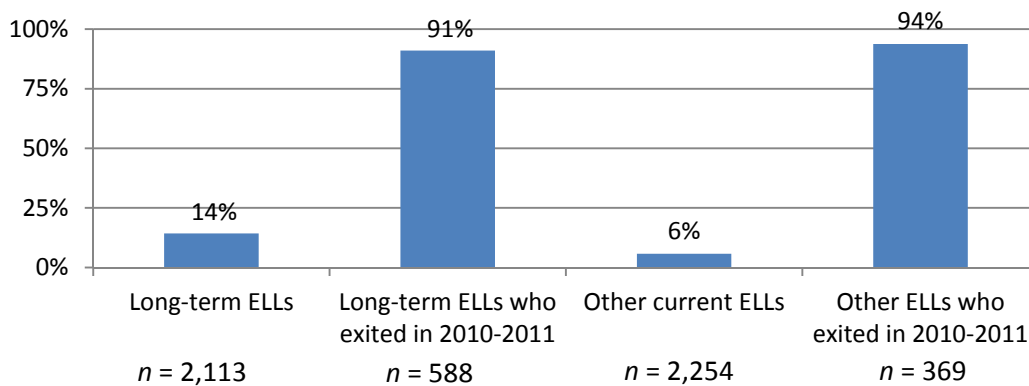


Source. AISD student records, 2010–2011

Note. Fifteen percent (n = 357) of long-term ELLs did not take all sections of the TELPAS and were not included in the above figure.

The data suggest that not all long-term ELLs were struggling in English, according to their TELPAS results. Approximately 14% (n = 302) of long-term ELLs grades 6–11 partially met the criteria (i.e., for TAKS and TELPAS) to exit the language program (Figure 8) and did not exit the language program in Spring 2011. It is possible that exit criteria were inconsistently applied or that the exiting review process was delayed at the campus level, but further investigation would be required to determine any campus-level differences.

Figure 8. English Language Learners (ELLs) in Grades 6 through 11 Who Passed Reading Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), Scored *Advanced* in Listening and Speaking on Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS), and Who Scored *Advanced High* on Writing TELPAS or Passed Writing TAKS; 2010–2011; by Long-Term ELL and Exited Status



Source. AISD student records, 2010–2011

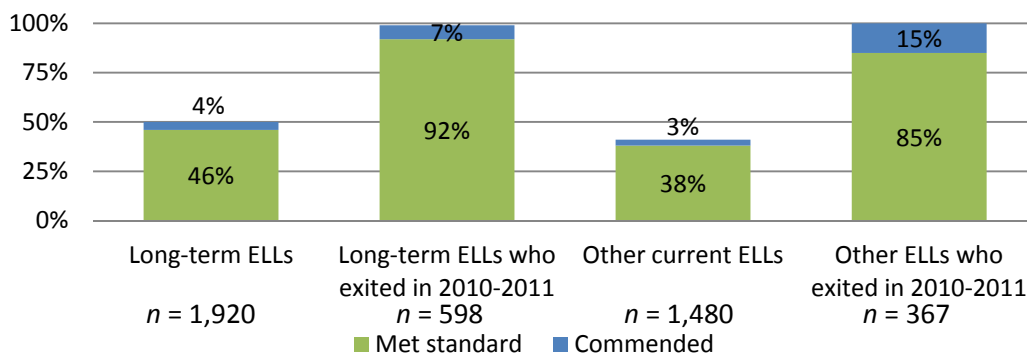
Note. Students had to pass the standard or accommodated version of TAKS. For grades 10 and 11, ELLs could pass ELA TAKS instead of receiving *advanced high* on writing TELPAS. “Other exited ELLs” refers to ELLs who exited in 2010–2011 but were ELL in Fall 2010.

Student academic achievement. The state-mandated TAKS was administered annually to students in mathematics (math; grades 3 through 11); in reading (grades 3 through 9); in ELA (grades 10 and 11); in writing (grades 4 and 7); in science (grades 5, 8, 10, and 11); and in social studies (grades 8, 10, and 11).

Spanish versions of the TAKS were only available for students in grades 3 through 5.

A greater percentage of long-term ELLs than of other current ELLs passed reading, science, and writing TAKS in 2010–2011 (Figures 9–13). The data suggest not all long-term ELLs were academic strugglers, according to their TAKS results. Although fewer long-term ELLs than other current ELLs passed social studies and math, a small percentage of long-term ELLs received *commended* performance on these assessments. It is possible that some long-term ELLs were academically and linguistically ready to exit the language program in 2010–2011 but did not.

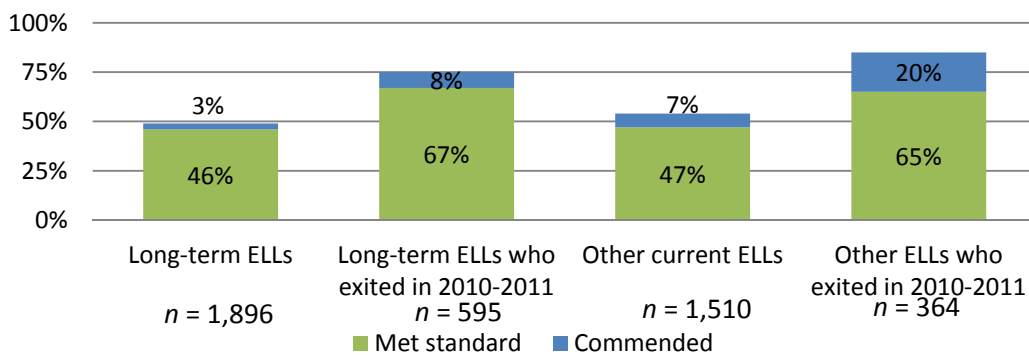
Figure 9. English Language Learners (ELLs) Who Passed Reading or English Language Arts Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), by Long-Term ELL and Exited Status, 2010–2011



Source. AISD student records, 2010–2011

Note. “Other exited ELLs” refers to ELLs who exited in 2010–2011 but were ELL in Fall 2010.

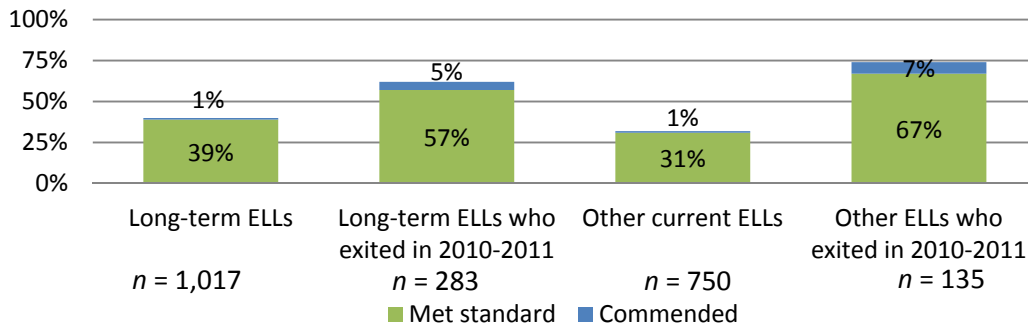
Figure 10. English Language Learners (ELLs) Who Passed Math Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), by Long-Term ELL and Exited Status, 2010–2011



Source. AISD student records, 2010–2011

Note. “Other exited ELLs” refers to ELLs who exited in 2010–2011 but were ELL in Fall 2010.

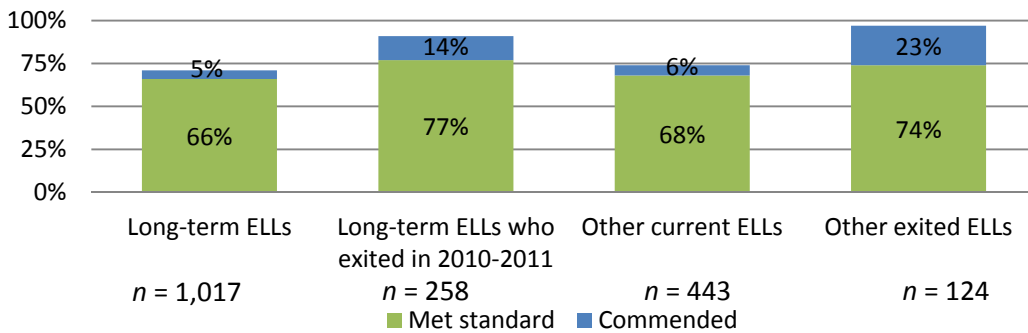
Figure 11. English Language Learners (ELLs) Who Passed Science Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), by Long-Term ELL and Exited Status, 2010–2011



Source. AISD student records, 2010–2011

Note. Not all grade levels take the science TAKS. “Other exited ELLs” refers to ELLs who exited in 2010–2011 but were ELL in Fall 2010.

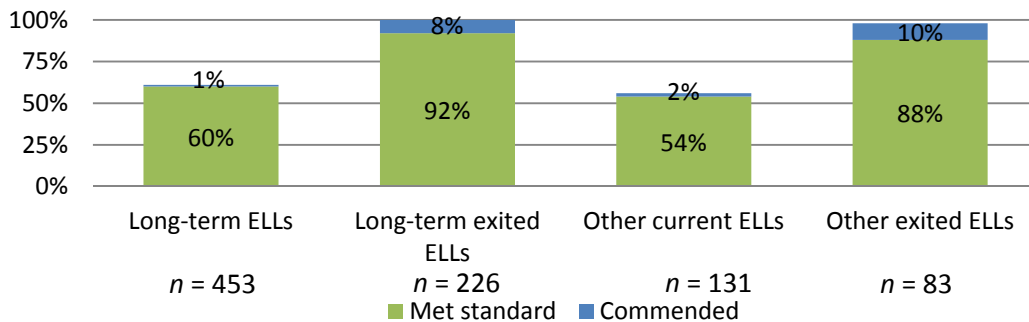
Figure 12. English Language Learners (ELLs) Who Passed Social Studies Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), by Long-Term ELL and Exited Status, 2010–2011



Source. AISD student records, 2010–2011

Note. Not all grade levels take the social studies TAKS. “Other exited ELLs” refers to ELLs who exited in 2010–2011 but were ELL in Fall 2010.

Figure 13. English Language Learners (ELLs) Who Passed Writing Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), by Long-Term ELL and Exited Status, 2010–2011



Source. AISD student records, 2010–2011

Note. Seventh grade takes the writing TAKS. “Other exited ELLs” refers to ELLs who exited in 2010–2011 but were ELL in Fall 2010.

Conclusion. Upon examination of the data, an early identification system for long-term ELLs is not advisable because systemic or procedural reasons may explain why ELLs do not exit the BE/ESL program within the expected 5-to-7 year time period. Unlike a “dropout” early warning system based on a measure initiated by the student (i.e., the student drops out), long-term ELL status is based on a construct of what should occur but has not, which may not be entirely based on students’ performance.

DRE staff suggest that a system be established that flags students who are ready for exit, based on available assessment criteria. Campus staff should electronically document why flagged students do not exit (e.g., parental denial). The system should include an administrators’ report that provides information about campus-level exit rates and aggregate data based on exit-level criteria.

DRE staff also suggest a separate reporting system to identify ELLs struggling in English proficiency and academic content areas, according to the number of years they have been in the program, to detect earlier if the students have learning disabilities or need other intervention services. Administrators would need to define and create indicators and criteria for this intervention system that could be combined with efforts for the district’s child study system² (see <http://www.childstudysystem.com/>).

References

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- Lindholm-Leary, K. J. (2001). *Dual language education*. Avon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (1997). *School effectiveness for language minority students*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition.

Technical Notes

(1) **Table T-1. Long-term English Language Learner Classification**

AISD grade-level entry	Not long-term	Long-term
Early education (EE)	8 years or fewer	9 years or more
Prekindergarten (PK)	7 years or fewer	8 years or more
Kindergarten (KG)	6 years or fewer	7 years or more
1st through 12th grade	5 years or fewer	6 years or more

Note. For data programming purposes, an additional year was added in the definition of long-term ELL. In the fall, the student had not completed a full year, so a count of 6 years enrollment is technically 5 full years of program participation.

² Visit <http://www.childstudysystem.com/> for more information.

(2) Table T-2. Current and Long-Term English Language Learners (ELLs) in Special Education (SE), 2010–2011

Grade level	Current ELL			Long-term ELL – did not exit		
	Total	Number in SE	Percentage in SE	Total	Number in SE	Percentage in SE
6	986	116	12	191	56	29
7	583	46	8	481	85	18
8	392	27	7	442	92	21
9	521	19	4	501	106	21
10	411	25	6	281	85	30
11	318	20	6	217	84	39
12	206	14	7	264	89	34

Source. AISD student records, 2010–2011

Note. Long-term ELLs who exited in 2010-2011 were included among current ELLs

(3) Table T-3. Current and Long-Term English Language Learners (ELLs) Who Repeated a Grade, 2010–2011

Grade level	Current ELL			Long-term ELL – did not exit		
	Total	Number	Percentage	Total	Number	Percentage
6	986	28	3	191	120	63
7	583	25	4	481	96	20
8	392	24	6	442	109	25
9	521	80	15	501	216	43
10	411	42	10	281	86	31
11	318	40	13	217	76	35
12	206	39	19	264	105	40

Source. AISD student records, 2010–2011

Note. Long-term ELLs who exited in 2010-2011 were included among current ELLs

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