

POLICY BRIEF

ACCESS TO CORE CONTENT FOR SECONDARY ENGLISH LEARNERS

Exclusionary Tracking and Graduation

Exclusionary tracking

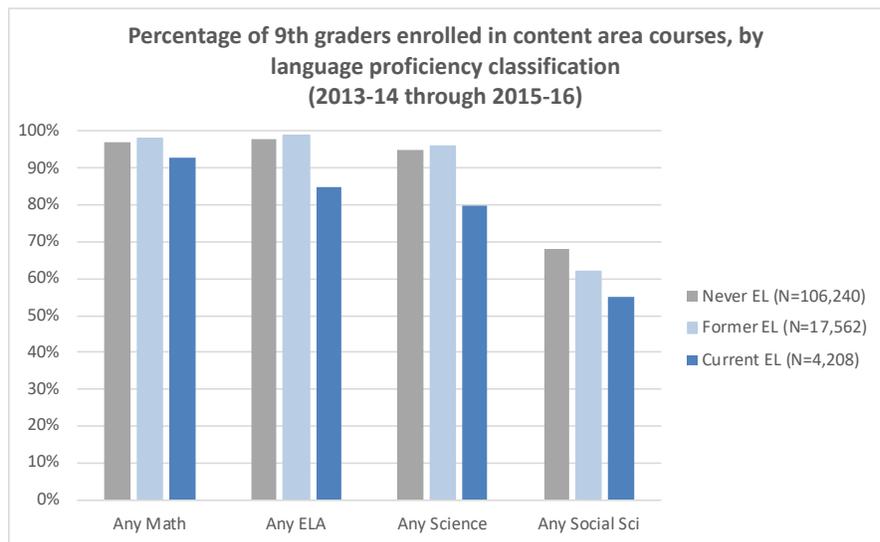
occurs when students are excluded from all courses within a particular content area. ELs experience exclusionary tracking at higher rates than other students (Umansky, 2016).

In Oregon, students must complete 24 credits to graduate:

- four English language arts (ELA) credits
- three math credits
- three science credits
- three social science credits
- one P.E. credit
- one health credit
- three credits in a second language, the arts, or career and technical education
- six elective credits

Exclusionary tracking directly impacts students' access to core content and can thus impact students' ability to graduate.

Gaps in Core Content Enrollment

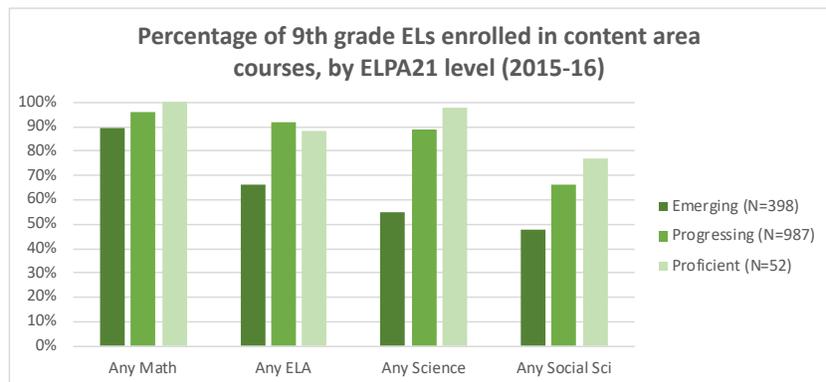


To explore whether ELs were experiencing exclusionary tracking, we analyzed course enrollment data for all 9th graders in Oregon from 2013-14 through 2015-16. We chose 9th grade because prior research has shown that 9th grade experiences have important impacts on students' likelihood of graduating. We determined whether students were enrolled in any ELA, math, science, and social studies classes. We calculated core content enrollment for three groups: current ELs, former ELs (who were previously classified as ELs but have exited EL services), and never ELs (who were never classified as ELs).

Results indicated that 9th grade current ELs were significantly less likely to be enrolled in core content courses. For example, 80% of current ELs were enrolled in a science course in 9th grade compared to 95% of never ELs and 96% of former ELs. Given that four years of ELA is required for graduation, it is particularly concerning that only 85% of 9th grade current ELs were enrolled in an ELA course.

Variation in 9th Grade Core Content Enrollment by English Proficiency Level

To explore variation in 9th grade core content enrollment among the current EL group, we calculated course enrollment for students at different English language proficiency (ELP) levels, as determined by their level on the ELPA21 assessment.



As the righthand graph illustrates, students with lower

ELP levels were significantly less likely to be enrolled in core content courses. For example, 55% of 9th grade ELs at the Emerging level were enrolled in a science course compared to 89% of students at the Progressing level, and 98% of students at the Proficient level.

Policy and Practice Implications

Given the concerning exclusionary tracking that current ELs seem to be experiencing at the high school level, a variety of policy solutions may be needed.

- Consider legislation at the state level to prohibit exclusionary tracking for ELs. California recently passed such a law (AB 2735, 2018).
- Consider modifying the 9th grade on-track indicator. Currently, Oregon's 9th grade on-track indicator signals whether students have completed one-fourth of the total number of credits needed to graduate. Because the indicator does not account for whether the credits completed are the types of credits needed to graduate (e.g., the required number of ELA credits), current ELs may be considered on-track even though they may not be accumulating the content-area credits required for graduation.
- Expand opportunities for ELs to take content courses in their home language, through secondary bilingual programs and/or online courses.
- Support districts and schools in collecting and analyzing data about course-taking, including data about exclusionary tracking. Districts could be required to analyze data about course-taking as part of their needs assessments for various state programs, including the Student Success Act.
- Because four years of ELA are required to graduate, it is particularly problematic if ELs are not enrolled in ELA courses each year. It may be useful to explore options for integrating ELA and English Language Development coursework.
- It may be useful to deepen and expand efforts to provide professional development for secondary content teachers about ways to effectively scaffold their instruction for students at a range of English proficiency levels.

References

Umansky, I. M. (2016). Leveled and exclusionary tracking: English learners' access to academic content in middle school. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(6), 1792-1833.