By High School, Former English Learners Far Outnumber Current English Learners

When the ODE/OSU English Learner Partnership began in 2014, a first goal was to determine the number of former English learners in Oregon schools. This was an essential first step to understanding outcomes for current, former, ever, and never ELs.

As the above figure illustrates, the relative size of the current EL and former EL groups changes dramatically across grades. By high school, former ELs outnumber current ELs by more than three to one. For example, among students who were 9th graders in 2016-17 and were ever classified as ELs, 77% were former ELs and 23% were current ELs.

This research was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences and the Spencer Foundation. The analysis was conducted by Dr. Karen D. Thompson (OSU), Dr. Ilana Umansky (UO), and Dr. Josh Rew (ODE), with feedback from state and university partners.
The Current EL Group at the High School Level Includes Many Newcomers and Many Students with Disabilities

Among students in grades 9-12 in 2016-17 who were classified as current ELs:

- 40% had been enrolled in Oregon schools for three years or less.
- 15% had been enrolled in Oregon schools between four and six years.
- 45% had been enrolled in Oregon schools for seven years or more.
- Among those who had been enrolled in Oregon schools for seven years or more, 56% were identified as having a disability.

Graduation Rates for Current ELs Are Concerning, But Former ELs Graduate at Higher Rates than Students Never Classified as ELs.

The table below shows 2016-17 four-year cohort graduation rates for current ELs, former ELs, ever ELs, and never ELs and also reports the number of students in each group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Proficiency Group</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current ELs</td>
<td>54.9%</td>
<td>1,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former ELs</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
<td>5,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever ELs (Current + Former)</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>7,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never ELs</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
<td>38,403</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is very concerning that just over half (54.9%) of the current EL group graduates from high school within four years. However, it is important to note that former ELs graduate at rates higher than students never classified as ELs (80.0% compared to 77.2%). Because the former EL group outnumbers the current EL group more than three to one, that means that the graduation rate for the combined ever EL group, which includes both current and former ELs, is quite similar to the graduation rate for never ELs (73.9% compared to 77.2%).

Policy Implications

- Reporting outcomes only for current ELs fails to provide sufficient information for education systems to effectively understand and respond to students’ needs.
- To better understand students’ needs and system performance, it is important to report outcomes for current, former, ever, and never ELs.
- Oregon has already integrated reporting about current, former, ever, and never ELs into several systems. However, there are still additional opportunities to extend and deepen this practice.
- Oregon has shared its work on reporting outcomes for current, former, ever, and never ELs with other states, and some states have shown strong interest in implementing this practice.
- A requirement to report outcomes for current, former, ever, and never ELs should be incorporated into the next reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

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