Among students who entered Oregon as English learners in kindergarten, about three-fourths of students exited English learner services within seven years

When the ODE/OSU partnership began in 2014, an initial research question was: How long does it take English learners (ELs) to attain English proficiency and exit EL services? Knowing the answer to this question is important for establishing expected timeframes for attaining English proficiency, as required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Analyzing longitudinal data from students who entered Oregon schools as ELs in kindergarten between 2006-07 and 2012-13, we found that 73% exited EL services within seven years, as illustrated in Figure 1. This was in line with prior research, which found that students typically need between four to seven years to develop academic proficiency in English (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000).

This research was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences (Grant R305H140072) and the Spencer Foundation. The analysis was conducted by Dr. Karen D. Thompson and Dr. Guadalupe Diaz of OSU, with feedback from state and university partners.
For the first time, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) allowed states to establish expected timeframes for students to attain English proficiency that varied depending on students’ initial English proficiency and several other factors. Given this opportunity, Oregon drew on our partnership research findings, research in other states, and stakeholder input to develop its English language proficiency indicator. Under Oregon’s on-track to ELP indicator, most students are expected to attain English proficiency within seven years (or less if they entered school with higher ELP levels). Students with disabilities or interrupted formal education are expected to attain English proficiency within eight years.

### Policy Implications

- While establishing expected timeframes for attaining English proficiency is required under federal law, focusing accountability systems on exiting students from EL services quickly can be counterproductive. For example, other research, including research in Oregon, shows that students in dual language programs take slightly longer to become proficient in English but are ultimately more likely to do so (e.g., Steele et al., 2017).
- Given changes to Oregon’s English language proficiency assessment, there is a need to review and update expected timeframes for attaining English proficiency when more years of data are available.
- Administrators and teachers may benefit from professional development about strategies for using data from Oregon’s on-track to ELP indicator in ways that inform district- and school-level planning.

### References
