



Academic Progress for English Learners

The Role of School Language Environment and Course Placement in Grades 6–12

January 24, 2019

Laura Hill, Julian Betts, Megan Hopkins,
Magaly Lavadenz, et al.

Supported with funding from the W. T. Grant Foundation



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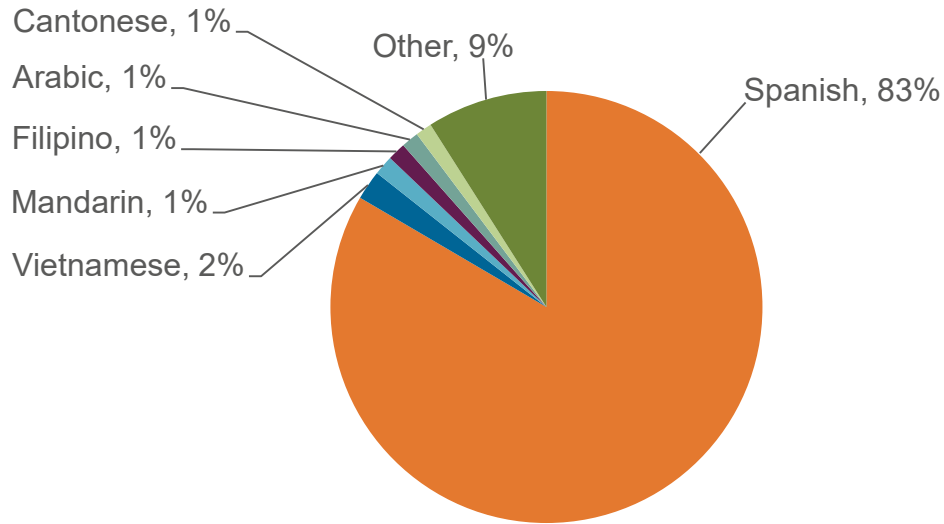
25 YEARS

English Learner students are California's future

- 1.3 million English Learner (EL) students
 - 21% of K–12 students
 - 38% including former ELs
- EL status is meant to be temporary
 - Assessed at school entry
 - Provided services and supports to improve English proficiency
 - Reclassified as English proficient according to criteria set by district (with state guidance)



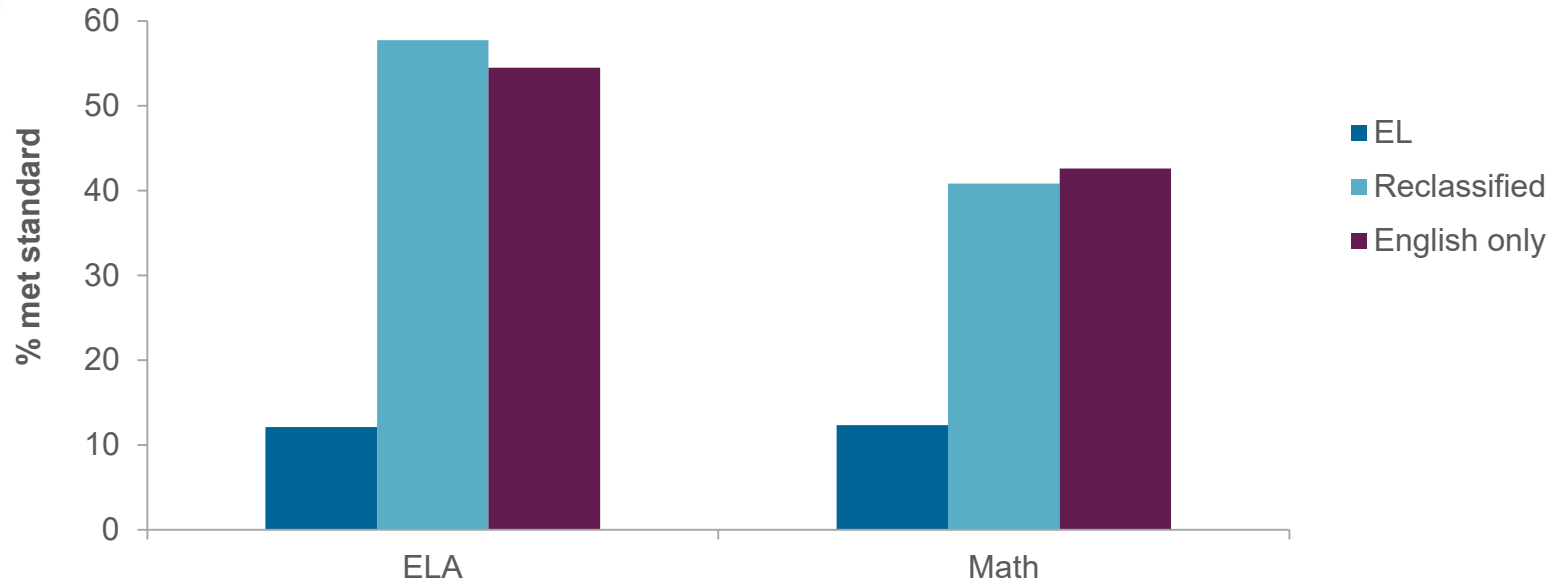
Most of the state's ELs speak Spanish at home



Source: CDE, 2016–17 school year.



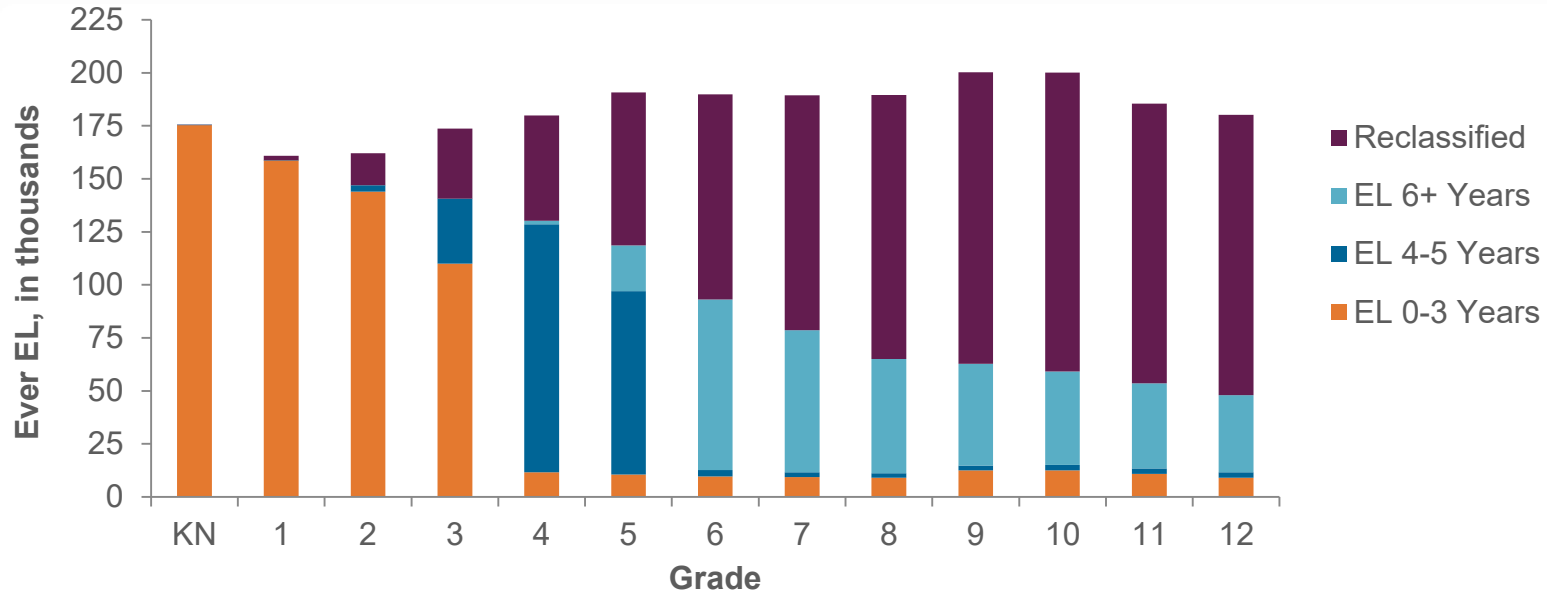
Reclassified ELs have strong academic performance



Source: CDE Smarter Balanced Assessment Results, 2016–17 school year.



But some ELs take many years to reclassify



Source: CDE, 2016–17 school year.



Recent reforms aim to improve outcomes for English Learners

- Local Control Funding Formula directs funding to ELs
- Local Control and Accountability Plans
- Prop 58 (bilingual education)
- Dashboard includes metrics for “ever ELs”
- English Learner Roadmap
- English Learner reclassification is in flux



English Learners' academic needs vary

- ELs are not a monolithic group
 - Long-term ELs
 - Late-arriving ELs (or newcomers)
- ELs in middle and high school face unique challenges
 - Attain English fluency
 - Master academic content needed for high school diploma



Outline

- Research approach
- Trends in academic progress
- School language environment
- English language development (ELD) course placement
- Conclusions



We study California's two largest school districts

	San Diego Unified	LA Unified
% EL	24%	25%
% low income	61%	81%
% ELs speak Spanish	74%	93%
% ELs low income	87%	91%
Total district enrollment	128,040	633,621



Quantitative analysis of student-level data

- Grades 6–12, 2006–2016
 - **Long-term ELs:** 5+ years
 - **Late-arriving ELs:** initial CELDT in 6th grade or later, scoring at beginning level
 - **Never ELs:** native or initially fluent English speakers
- Descriptive and regression analyses
 - Examined academic and linguistic outcomes



Interviews with administrators and teachers

- District-level administrator interviews
 - Included EL directors and school support staff
 - Focused on understanding specific policies for course assignment and changes over time
- 8–9 schools per district, ~5 interviews per school
 - Selected schools represent range of demographic contexts
 - Included administrators and teachers
 - Focused on policy implementation processes and demographics

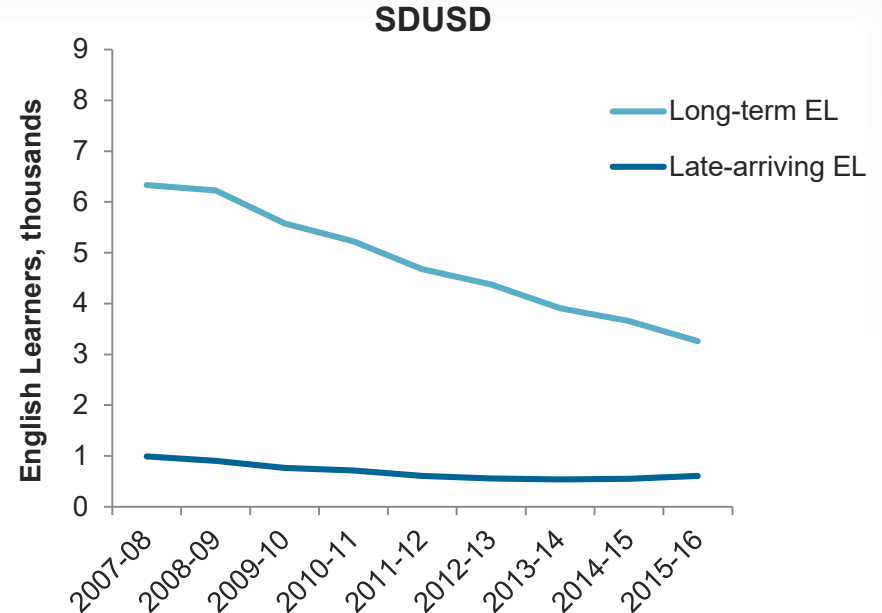
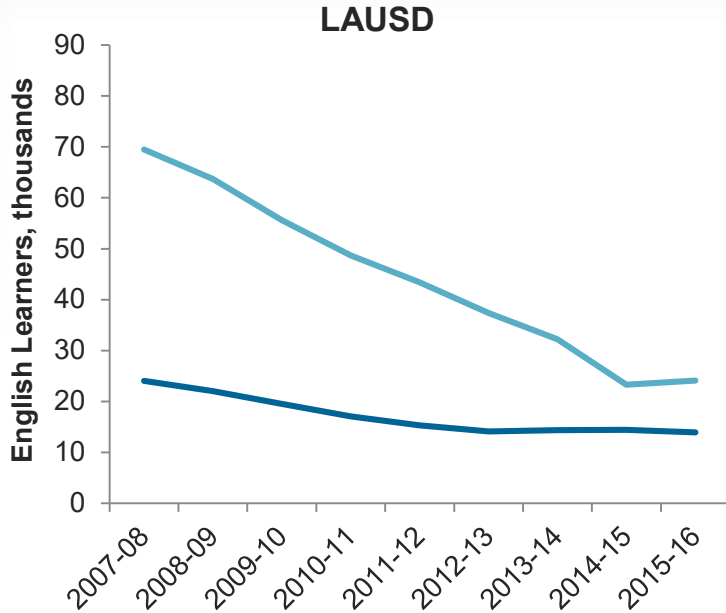


Outline

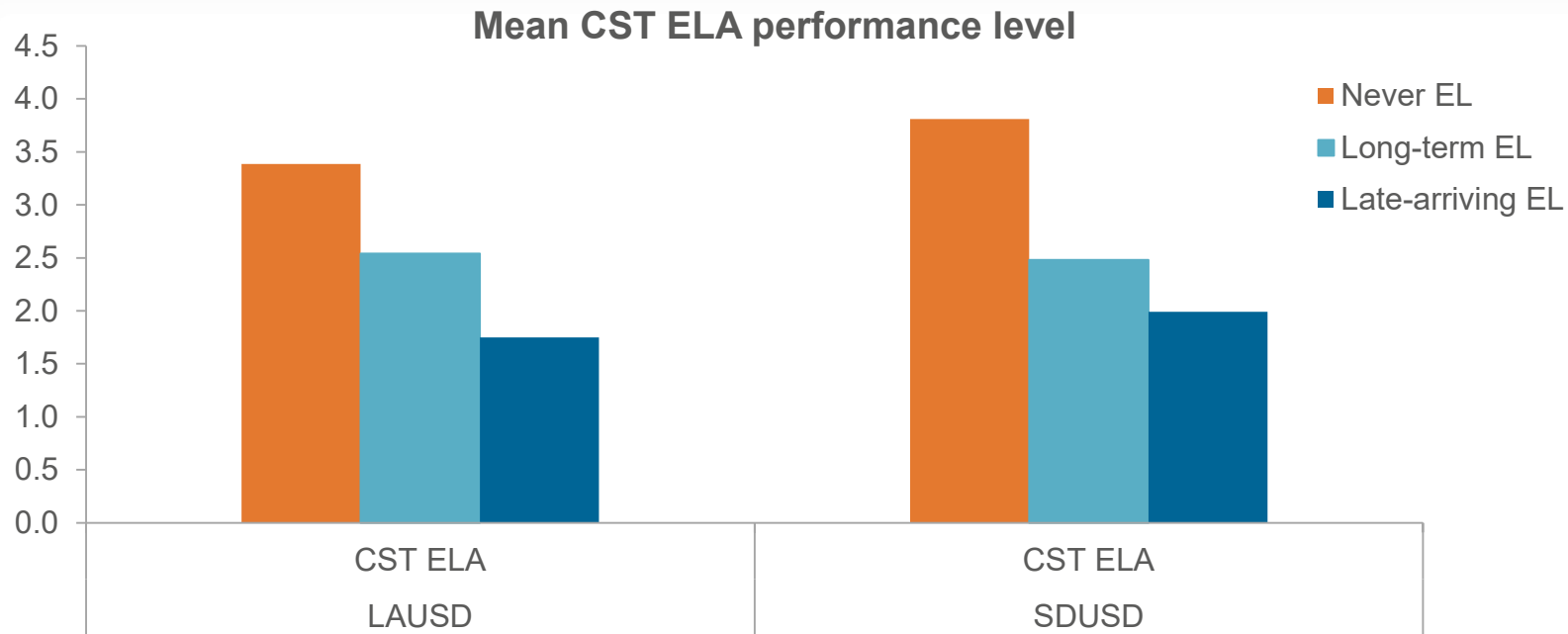
- Research approach
- Trends in academic progress
- School language environment
- English language development (ELD) course placement
- Policy implications



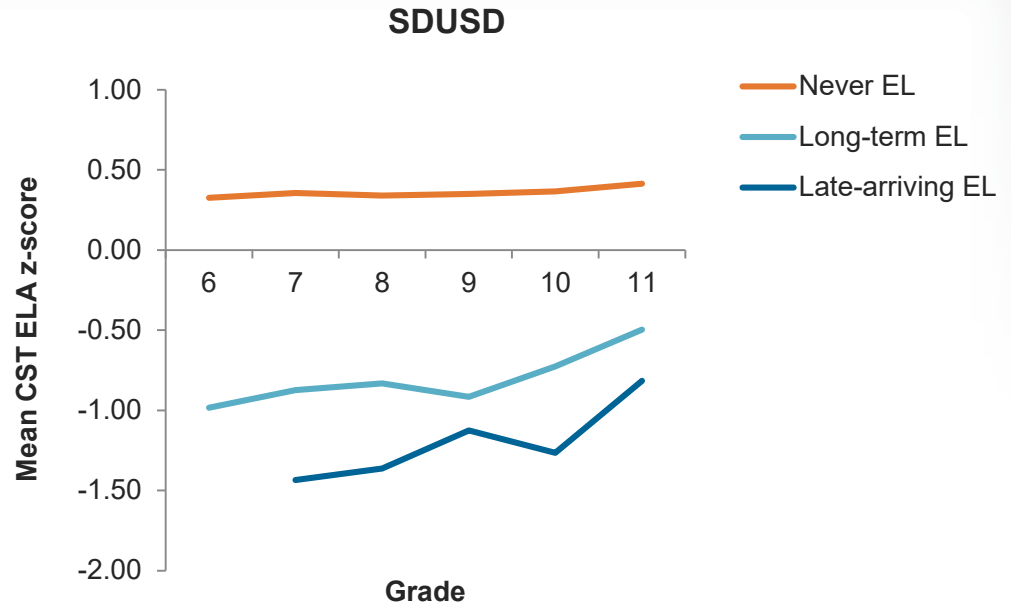
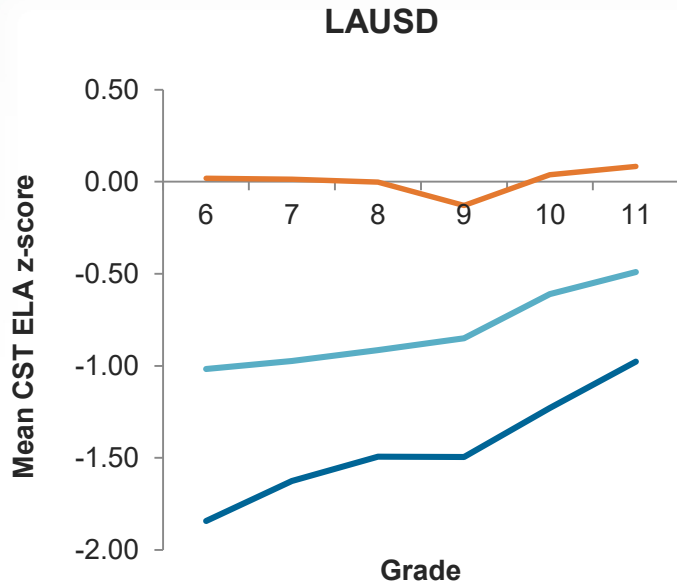
Number of ELs in grades 6–12 is declining over time



Late-arriving ELs have lower academic English performance...



... but they narrow the gap over time



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How might the language mix of students at schools affect outcomes?

- School language environment could be related to student outcomes for ELs and never ELs
 - Peers
 - Teachers
- Three school measures
 - % EL
 - % students speaking same home language (varies by student)
 - Homogeneity of languages spoken by ELs



English Learners' progress seems adaptable to different school language environments

- Percentage of ELs
 - No negative associations for never ELs
 - Mixed results for EL student groups
- Percentage of students speaking the same language at the school as the student in question
 - Associated with higher test scores and greater chances of graduating on time for never EL students
- Greater language homogeneity among ELs
 - Little statistical relationship with academic outcomes, not consistent across districts



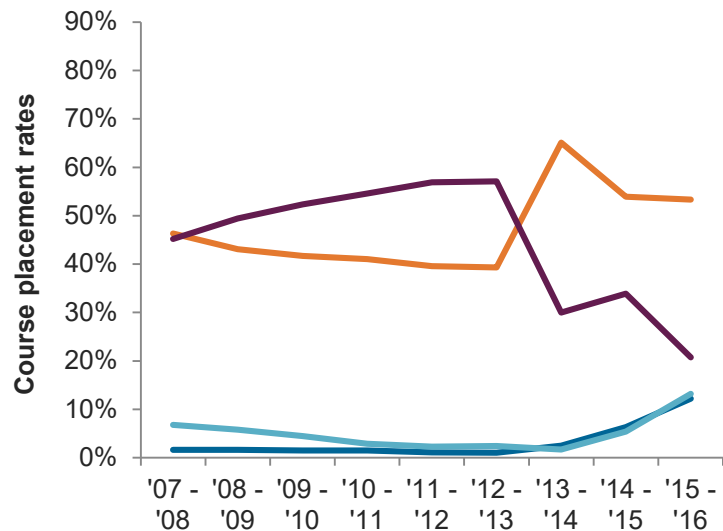
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 - Correct placement rates over time
 - Challenges to correct course placement
 - Course placement and outcomes
- Conclusions

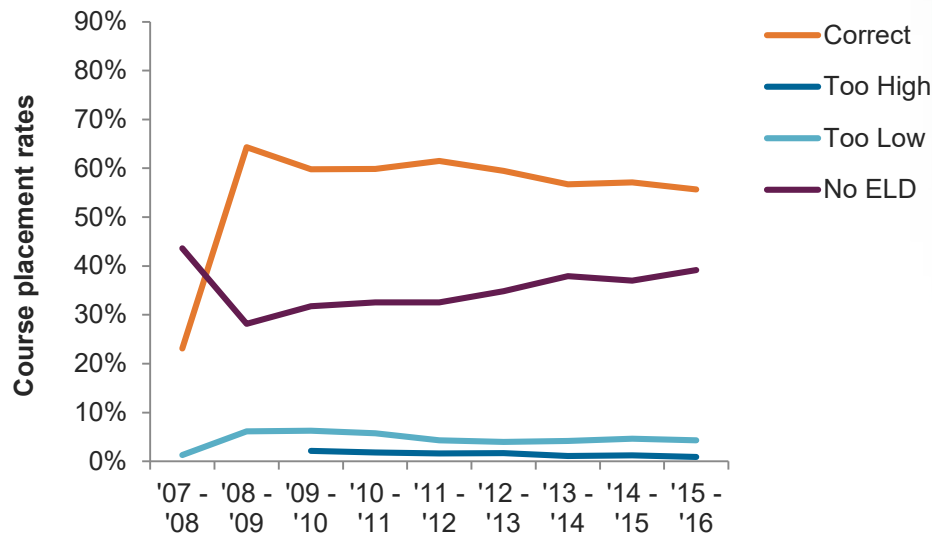


For long-term ELs, “no ELD” placement has declined in LA but increased recently in SD

LAUSD



SDUSD



ELD courses for long-term ELs differed across the districts

LAUSD

- As of 2013–14, Advanced ELD or Language and Literacy was mandatory and carried a–g credit

SDUSD

- As of 2012–13, some schools offered an Academic Language Development course, but it was not mandatory or credit-bearing



School staff raised concerns about course offerings for long-term ELs

LAUSD

*“I think our kids need more hands-on, more application. I find that they have a lot of scripted things to do and it's not real to them and **they get bored**. The prompts are not made for them. They need something they can connect to.”*

–Middle school principal

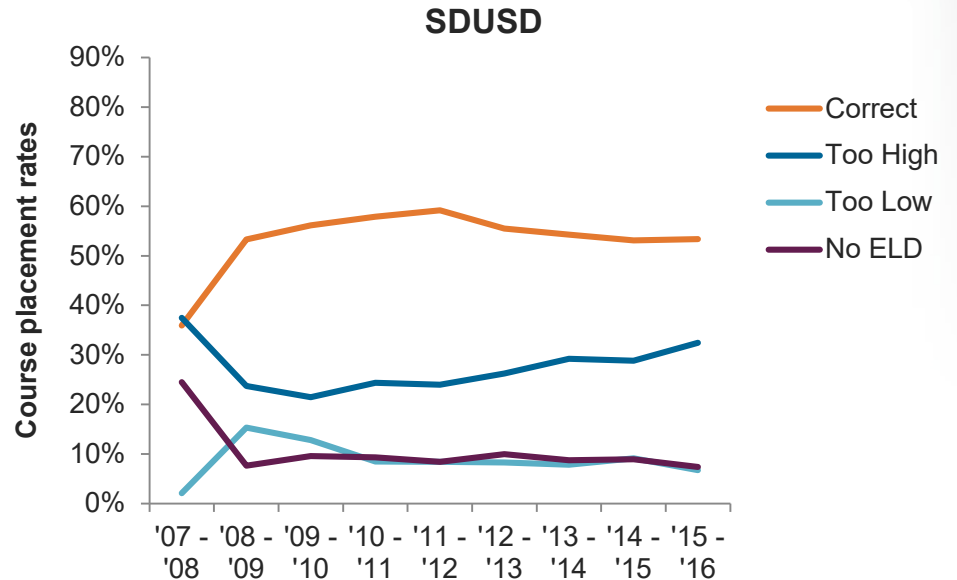
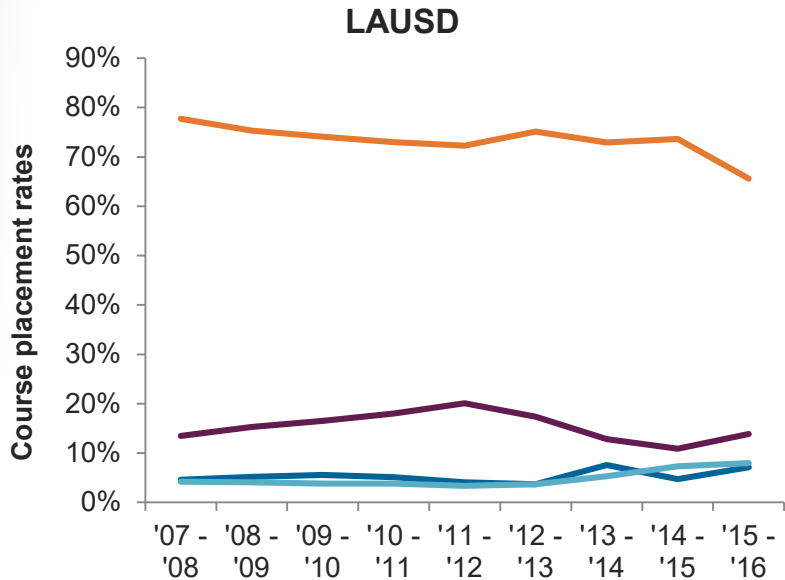
SDUSD

*“The way that that curriculum is laid out, is that it's **very repetitive**, it's constant repeat. A big part of what I'm trying to do is find that balance of how can we be repetitive without being boring.”*

–ALD teacher



Late-arriving ELs have higher rates of any ELD placement in both districts



Implementation varied across the two districts

LAUSD

- Entered a voluntary agreement with the Office for Civil Rights in 2013–14
- Developed a centralized data management system and EL Dashboard
- Offered newcomer centers in some schools

SDUSD

- Emphasized school-level flexibility in courses offered
- Decreased newcomer program offerings in 2016–17; integrated newcomers into general content courses



Fewer ELs in a school means fewer course options

- Both districts experienced declining EL enrollment, which presented challenges for schools with small EL populations
- Some SDUSD schools eliminated ELD courses due to budget cuts
- Some LAUSD schools relied on multiple rostering to fill ELD courses



Both districts reported fewer course options

*“We used to have ELD classes when we had more kids... then as our population started to fall, **we didn’t have enough** for kids at each level to really justify it.”*

– SDUSD middle school counselor

*“When we do have classes where there are not enough students ... those courses are usually **double rostered**. ELD 1, 2, 3, and 4 might be ... together because altogether they may have 18 students in one school site. Four levels is worst-case scenario.”*

– LAUSD district leader



EL support teachers declined in San Diego

- Drop in San Diego's English Language Support Teachers (ELSTs) from 120 to 46
- A higher ratio of ELSTs to ELs in a school is correlated with:
 - Higher GPA for both long-term and late-arriving ELs
 - Increase in CELDT scores for late-arriving ELs



Support teachers in San Diego were critical to placement processes

*“Schools with ELSTs would communicate with each other. . . . When you have those people in place **it’s easy to work on articulation** [between middle and high school], but when you don’t, I don’t know how much people talk to each other.”*

- SDUSD resource teacher



We found few consistencies in the role of course placement across districts

- Examined associations between schools' levels of ELD course placement
 - Too high
 - Too low
 - No ELD
- Most consistent findings were for negative association of no ELD course and academic outcomes
 - But we saw variation in results for ELD placement that was too high or too low



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Conclusions

- Both districts saw declines in long-term and late-arriving ELs
- Long-term ELs have higher English fluency and standardized test scores, but late-arriving ELs make greater academic gains
- Organizational factors contribute to whether and how ELD courses are offered
 - Size of EL population
 - District centralization
 - Availability of EL-specific staff and resources



Conclusions

- Higher proportions of ELs at a school should not be seen as detrimental to the academic performance of never ELs
- In San Diego, EL support teachers at schools were associated with better outcomes
- No ELD instruction was associated with slower growth on state ELA tests
 - For long-term ELs in both districts, newcomers in San Diego





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Notes on the use of these slides

These slides were created to accompany a presentation. They do not include full documentation of sources, data samples, methods, and interpretations. To avoid misinterpretations, please contact:

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Thank you for your interest in this work.

