



Multilingual Learners in Southeast Los Angeles

Access, Outcomes, and Recommendations for Student Success



Table of Contents

Open Letter	2
Introduction	3
Overview of Schools in Southeast Los Angeles	5
Overview of Multilingual Learners in SELA Schools	7
Progress towards English Proficiency	10
Academic Achievement in SELA	13
College and Career Readiness in SELA	15
Dual Language Immersion in SELA	20
Recommendations	27
Appendix: Methodology	30

Open Letter

SELA's multilingual learners deserve better. The data shows what is possible when we invest in them.

Imagine a public education system that uplifts, honors and cultivates the native language, cultures, and identities of multilingual learners and all students. In Southeast Los Angeles (SELA), six out of every ten students are multilingual learners and speak a language other than English at home. These students are SELA and SELA is worth investing in.

Southeast Los Angeles is a glimpse into the future of Los Angeles County boasting a significantly younger demographic compared to the rest of California, with substantial concentrations of children and teens ages 0-17 making up 29.55%¹ of the population and holding nearly 40%² under the age of 24 makes SELA exceed county averages. It is a region of independent cities and neighborhoods, primarily young and Latina/o, with deep immigrant roots, with 43%³ of residents being foreign born. It is also a vital, high-volume artery for US goods movement through the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, which handles over 40%⁴ of all container imports entering the United States.

Investing in this region's future workforce, its students, the majority who are multilingual learners, is an investment in our county's future. When we support multilingual learners from the start of their educational journey, we are setting them up for the careers, economic mobility, and civic life this region and the rest of the country depend on.

Knowing more than one language is an asset. A 2025 survey of more than 50 Southern California businesses found that 84%⁵ of employers identified Spanish as their most in-demand language, with Chinese, Vietnamese, and others close behind. The cultural and linguistic identities of multilingual learner students promote our public education system as a vehicle for preserving culture and linguistic diversity. These students will carry these skills into every part of life, strengthening their workplaces, improving the institutions they are part of, and helping their communities feel connected. Realizing this vision requires ensuring that all of SELA's multilingual learners have the support and opportunities to get there.

This report highlights that when multilingual learners receive the right and holistic support, they thrive. Proficient English learners in SELA outperform their English-only peers in both reading and math. Our students need sustained investments, authentic family engagement, improved access to dual-language programs, consistent support and programs, college and career pathways, and a whole-child approach to student support.

We are calling on our state and local leaders, school decision-makers, community partners, and educators to help us build that future together.

In Solidarity,



Vanessa Aramayo
CEO and President



Stephanie Tapia Onate
Communications and Policy Manager

1. City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning, Southeast Los Angeles Community Plan Area Standard Report (2022), https://planning.lacity.gov/odocument/42408ff7-4609-47ba-a7aa-ea5d47f4f64c/standard_report2022_SOUTHEAST_LA_mail.pdf
2. City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning, Southeast Los Angeles Community Plan Area Standard Report (2022), https://planning.lacity.gov/odocument/42408ff7-4609-47ba-a7aa-ea5d47f4f64c/standard_report2022_SOUTHEAST_LA_mail.pdf
3. Emily Phillips (2022), SELA Collaborative Data Story - Neighborhood Data for Social Change, USC Neighborhood Data for Social Change.
4. California Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz), Transport & Logistics Resources, accessed May 1, 2026, <https://business.ca.gov/resources/transport-logistics/>
5. UNITE-LA, Beyond English: Employer Perspectives on Language Skills at Work (2026), https://www.unitela.com/beyond_english_report

Introduction

While California and many local communities have moved steadily toward affirming multilingualism as an asset, national policy and politics increasingly treat it as a liability. The current presidential administration has renewed efforts to undermine the cultural and educational rights of immigrant communities, impacting multilingual and English learners, the majority of whom are U.S.-born from immigrant families, cutting federal funding for English learners (ELs) and spreading rhetoric that devalues linguistic diversity. At the same time, immigrant families are increasingly under threat not only from changes in the federal landscape, but from enforcement actions that are reaching into their door steps. In this context, California's commitment to multilingual learners stands in stark contrast. California sees the reality: multilingualism is not a liability—it is a strength.

The benefits of multilingualism are many. **Research shows that multilingualism broadens perspectives, fosters empathy, and enhances cognitive development and problem-solving.**⁶ These benefits, however, are not automatic; they depend on whether multilingualism is valued across sectors—by schools, employers, policymakers, and communities alike. Within schools specifically, realizing these benefits requires affirming students' identities and providing the rigorous academic and language support they need to thrive. Multilingual learners enrich our school communities in countless ways, bringing diverse experiences, languages, perspectives, and ways of understanding the world that strengthen learning for their monolingual peers.⁷

SELA is a growing region made up of several independent cities and unincorporated neighborhoods.⁸ The region has 413,414 residents, and is predominantly Latina/o (about 94%), young, and includes many residents from immigrant families, with 43% of residents born outside of the U.S. and 37% under the age of 24.⁹ SELA has historically faced disparities in education, health, and economic opportunity, alongside environmental impacts such as high pollution exposure, limited green space, and outdated infrastructure, conditions shaped by decades of underinvestment. These conditions exist alongside one of SELA's greatest strengths: a highly multilingual student population.

Six in ten students in SELA are multilingual learners—students who are developing or have developed proficiency in English and one or more other languages, often their home language.¹⁰ They are a foundational part of SELA classrooms and communities, bringing rich cultural knowledge and language skills that enhance learning environments and strengthen civic life.

The goal of this report is to provide a comprehensive, multi-year assessment of how schools in SELA, a critical region in Southern California, are serving multilingual learners. This research builds upon data and findings from Alliance for a Better Community and Innovate Public Schools' [SELA Rising report](#), which examined how schools were serving Latina/o and English learner students in 2018-19.

The research questions guiding this report are:

1. How well are SELA schools supporting multilingual learners', especially English learners,¹¹ in attaining English proficiency, achieving academically, and preparing for college and career?
2. How accessible are multilingual programs in SELA, and how well are they serving English learners and multilingual learners?
3. What are the bright spots in outcomes for multilingual learners in SELA?
4. What are the persistent gaps and unmet needs for multilingual learners in SELA?

6. Barac, R. and Bialystock, E. (February 2012). *Bilingual effects on cognitive and linguistic development: Role of language, cultural background, and education*. *Child Dev.* 83(2):413-22

7. "Multilingual Learners Enrich Our Learning and Lives | WIDA." 2023. Wisc.Edu. 2023. <https://wida.wisc.edu/news/multilingual-learners-enrich-our-learning-and-lives>.

8. William Fulton, "Suburbs of Extraction," *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles*, (Point Arena, CA: Solano Press Books, 1997), 67-91.

9. Emily Phillips (2022). *SELA Collaborative Data Story – Neighborhood Data for Social Change*. USC Neighborhood Data for Social Change.

10. California lawmakers have embraced the term "multilingual" to affirm the value of these students' linguistic abilities and the unique contributions they make to their schools and communities.

11. English learners fall under the broader umbrella term of "multilingual learners". While "multilingual learner" is asset-based and acknowledges students' existing linguistic assets, "English learner" focuses specifically on students in schools who need additional support to learn English.

While this report uses the term “multilingual learners” to reflect the full spectrum of students developing proficiency in more than one language, its analysis centers on English learners. This focus reflects a key equity imperative: English learners and long-term language learners face the most pronounced academic challenges and have the greatest need for targeted support. As such, understanding how well SELA schools are serving this group is critical to advancing educational equity in a region that is under-resourced and a student population that is under-served.

Using enrollment and student outcome data from the California Department of Education and Los Angeles Unified (LAUSD), this report addresses the research questions above by comparing SELA schools to those in the rest of LAUSD and across the state. It begins with a demographic overview of multilingual learners in SELA, followed by sections on English learner outcomes in language development, academic achievement, and college and career readiness. The final section provides an analysis of student access to and performance in dual-language immersion programs.

Multilingual learners include:

- **Dual Language Learners:** Children ages 0–5 who are learning two languages simultaneously or learning a second language while continuing to develop their first (home) language.
- **English learners:** Students learning English as an additional language who require specialized support and services to become proficient in English.
- **Reclassified Fluent English Proficient:** Students who were previously classified as English learners and have met the state’s reclassification criteria for English proficiency. They no longer receive EL services nor are designated as language learners. Upon reclassification, the student is no longer considered an English learner.
- **Initially Fluent English Proficient:** Students whose home language survey indicates a language other than English but who demonstrate English proficiency on initial assessment.
- **Long-term English learners:** Students enrolled in California schools for six years or more but have not yet achieved English proficiency.
- **Native English speakers:** English-dominant students learning a second language, often through dual-language immersion programs.



Overview of schools in Southeast Los Angeles

This report focuses on the more than 56,000 students enrolled in the 98 traditional and charter public schools in the Southeast of LAUSD Board District 5.¹² Alternative schools, such as continuation schools, were excluded from the analyses in this report. Southeast Board District 5 includes the cities of South Gate, Huntington Park, Maywood, Bell, Cudahy, Vernon, and the communities of Walnut Park, Florence-Firestone, and northern Central Alameda.

SELA is high-density, working-class, and majority Latina/o, serving as a “mirror” of

Los Angeles County’s future, reflecting the demographic shifts, challenges, and community-driven resilience that characterizes the county. The majority of students in the region’s schools are low-income and Latina/o (96%), with six in ten multilingual learners (62%) and nearly a quarter classified as English learners (ELs). Compared to the rest of LAUSD and California, SELA has a higher proportion of Latina/o students, though overall enrollment has declined by 20% since 2016-17, from 69,833 to 56,104 students in 2023-24.¹³ Of the 98 schools in SELA, 76 are traditional public schools, 21 are charter schools, and one is an alternative school of choice; more than half (57%) are elementary schools, 15% are intermediate/middle schools, 17% are high schools, and the remaining 10% serve multiple grade spans. Together, these schools form the backbone of SELA’s communities, educating students who embody the region’s linguistic and cultural strengths.

The schools that we identified in the Southeast of LAUSD Board District 5 were required to meet the following three criteria:

- Must be a traditional public school, charter public school, or alternative school of choice,¹⁴
- Must be located in LAUSD Board District 5, and
- Must be located in one of the following zip codes: 90001, 90011, 90058, 90201, 90255, 90270, and 90280.

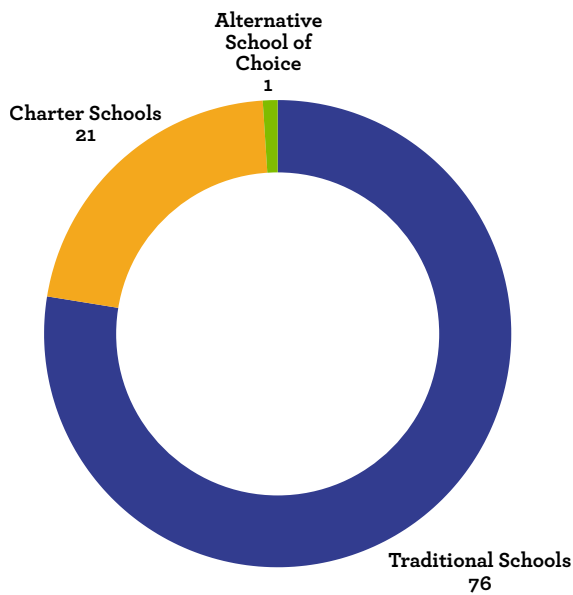
¹² 2023-24 Census Day Enrollment of schools in the Southeast portion of LAUSD Board District 5.

¹³ Three schools serve grades 6-12, two schools serve grades K-12, and five schools serve grades K-8.

¹⁴ The following school types are excluded: county community school, community day school, continuation school, juvenile court school, opportunity school, youth authority school, state special school, and home and hospital.

Exhibit 1. Schools in Southeast Los Angeles

Number of Schools by Type

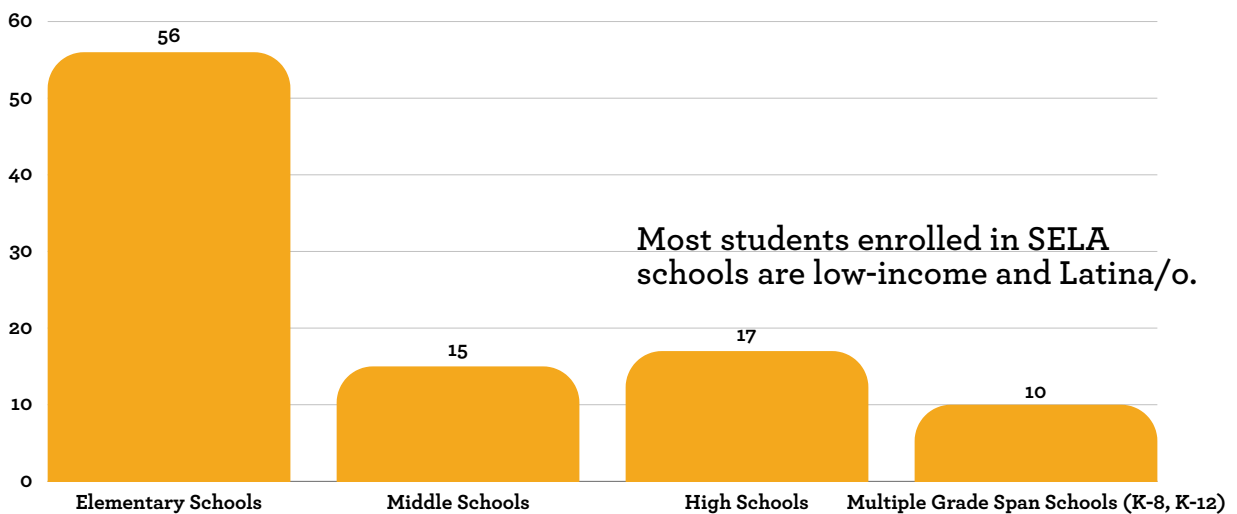


96% of students in SELA are Latina/o

94% of students in SELA are low-income

62% of students in SELA are multilingual

Number of Schools by Grade Span Served



Most students enrolled in SELA schools are low-income and Latina/o.



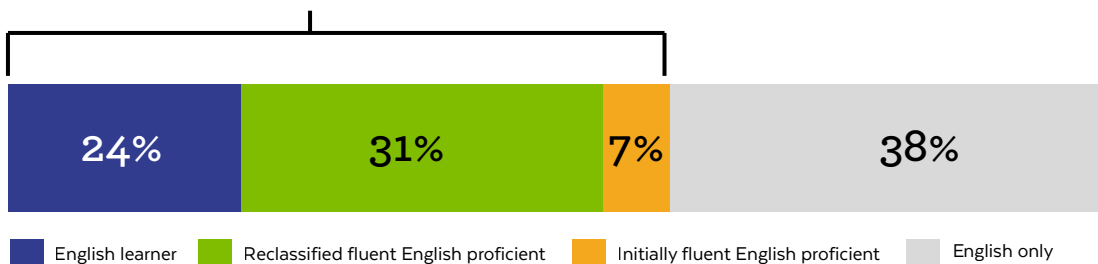
Overview of Multilingual Learners in SELA Public Schools

Southeast Los Angeles (SELA) is home to a large and culturally rich community and student population. Over 34,000 students in SELA are multilingual learners, making up six in ten of all students enrolled in SELA schools. These students include those classified by their schools as Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEP), Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP), and English learner (ELs) (see Exhibit 2). While multilingual learners make up the majority of students in SELA, enrollment declines have been steepest among this group. Multilingual learner enrollment has declined by 31% since 2016-17. In contrast, the number of English-only students in SELA has increased by 13% since 2016-17. These enrollment trends mirror statewide patterns, where declines in TK-12 enrollment are largely driven by reductions in the multilingual learner student population.¹⁴

Exhibit 2.

Six in 10 students in SELA are multilingual learners.

Percent of SELA students by English language acquisition status, 2023-24

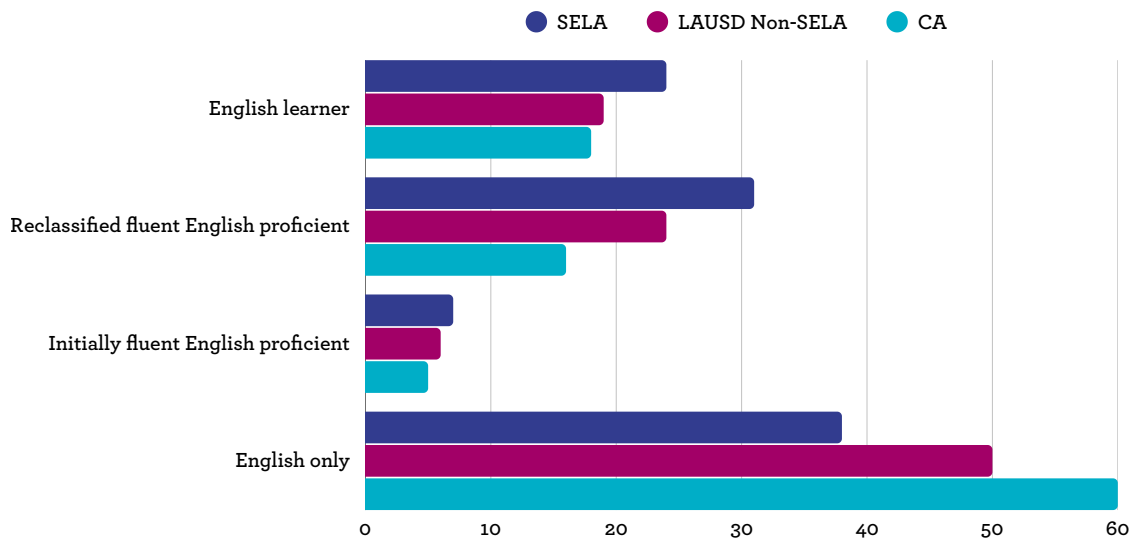


¹⁴ Hill, L. and Lafortune, J. (June 11, 2024). [California's multilingual population is driving TK-12 enrollment declines](#). Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC).

Among multilingual learners in SELA, English learners make up a significant group, with 13,421 students enrolled, nearly a quarter of all students in SELA schools. This is a larger proportion than in other LAUSD schools and across the state (see Exhibit 3). Additionally, over half (55%) of all students in SELA have been classified as ELs at some point in their academic journey.

Exhibit 3.
SELA schools enroll more English learners and students who have been reclassified than schools in LAUSD and statewide.

Percent of students by English language acquisition status, 2023-24



SELA schools also enroll a higher proportion of Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) students compared to other LAUSD schools and the state. There are 17,492 RFEP students in SELA, making up 31% of all students. In comparison, RFEP students make up 24% of all students in other LAUSD schools and 16% of students in other schools across California.

Nearly all SELA ELs’ and Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) students’ (99%) home language is Spanish. Compared to the rest of LAUSD and California, SELA has a greater percentage of ELs whose home language is Spanish (see Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4.
Most English learners in SELA, LAUSD, and California speak Spanish.

Percent of English learners that speak Spanish, 2023-24

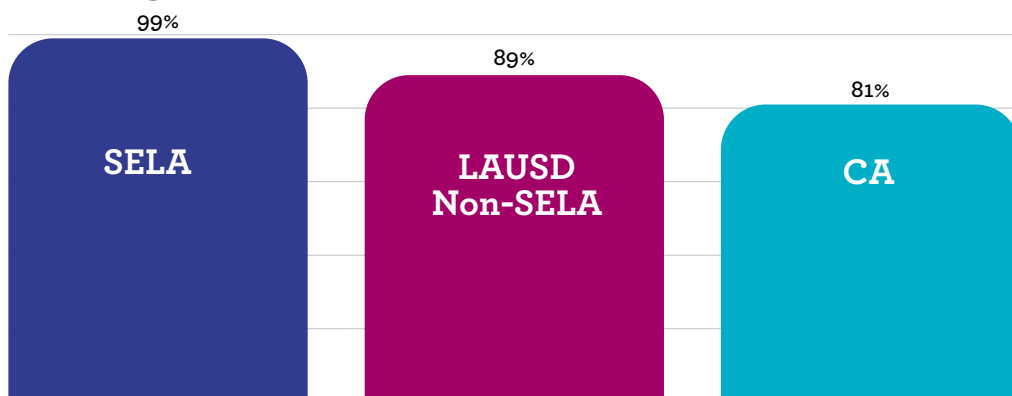


Figure A. How students are classified by language acquisition in California Public Schools

When a student enrolls in a California TK-12 public school, their parent or guardian completes a Home Language Survey to determine the student's exposure to languages other than English. Based on this information and a follow-up assessment (if applicable), students are classified into one of the following categories:

- **English Only (EO):** A student whose home language survey indicates that they speak only English at home. No further language assessment is required.
- **Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEP):** A student whose home language survey indicates a language other than English, but who demonstrates sufficient English language proficiency on the initial assessment. These students can fully access the curriculum without additional support.
- **English Learner (EL):** A student whose home language is not English and who does not demonstrate sufficient English proficiency on the initial assessment. These students receive specialized English Language Development (ELD) support.
- **Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP):** A student who was previously classified as an English Learner but has since met state criteria for English language proficiency. Upon reclassification, the student is no longer considered an EL and no longer receives ELD services.

A key goal for schools is to ensure that English learners (ELs) acquire full proficiency in English as quickly and effectively as possible. Research shows that most ELs can become fluent within four to seven years when they receive consistent, high-quality support.¹⁵ When that does not happen, it reflects gaps in systems and instruction—not in student ability.

This section evaluates how effectively SELA schools are supporting ELs in achieving English proficiency, using year-over-year data from the English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC). It focuses on two key indicators: annual progress as measured by the English Learner Progress Indicator (ELPI) and the percentage of students attaining Level 4—the highest level of English proficiency—on the ELPAC. It also examines the percentage of ELs who are at risk of becoming long-term English learners (at-risk LTELs) or who are already classified as LTELs

Less than half of English learners in SELA are making adequate annual progress in English language development.

In 2023-24, only 46% of ELs either advanced a performance level or maintained Level 4 on the ELPAC—similar to outcomes across LAUSD and the state. This represents just a 3 percentage point increase since 2018-19, highlighting persistent challenges despite some modest gains (see Exhibit 5).

Understanding the ELPAC

The **English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC)** evaluates students' English skills in **listening, speaking, reading, and writing**. It is used to identify English learners, monitor progress, guide support services, and determine reclassification.

- The **Initial ELPAC** is given to new students whose primary language is not English. Students scoring at Level 1 (Beginning) or Level 2 (Somewhat Developed) are classified as English learners (ELs). Those scoring at Level 3 (Moderately Developed) are designated as Initially Fluent English Proficient (IFEP).
- The **Summative ELPAC**, administered annually to ELs, tracks progress in language development. Students scoring at Level 4 (Well Developed) may be eligible for reclassification as fluent English proficient.

How well are SELA schools helping multilingual learners attain English proficiency?

Performance varies by grade span, with particularly concerning trends at the elementary level. The percentage of ELs in SELA elementary schools achieving Level 4 dropped sharply, from 36% in 2017-18 to just 15% in 2023-24. In middle schools, Level 4 attainment increased from 17% to 23% between 2017-18 and 2022-23, but dipped to 19% the following year.

These declines and stagnations coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted instruction and disproportionately impacted historically underserved students. Over the past few years, our students have faced unprecedented crises across Los Angeles County—including the pandemic, devastating wildfires, and heightened immigration enforcement, which have compounded impacts on students' learning and education. These events will contribute to additional learning loss on top of those already caused by COVID-19, highlighting the urgency of supporting ELs more holistically, addressing both their academic growth and socio-emotional well-being.

¹⁵Hakuta, K., Butler, Y. G., and Witt, D. (2000). [How long does it take English learners to attain proficiency?](#) The University of California Linguistic Minority Research Institute: Policy Report 2000-1.

Exhibit 5.

Less than half of English learners increased a performance level or remained proficient on the ELPAC, which is similar to other English learners in LAUSD and CA.

Percent of ELPAC testers meeting the criteria for progress (increase or maintain) between the prior and current year in SELA, LAUSD-Non SELA, and CA

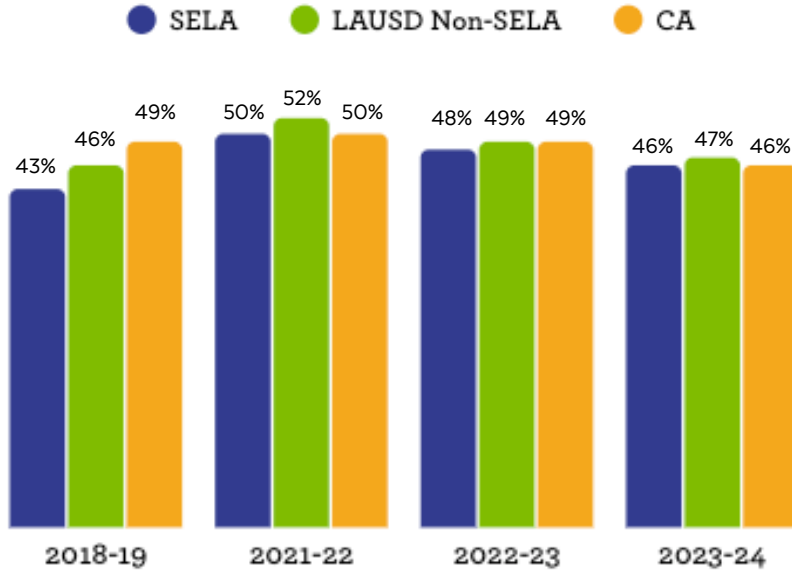
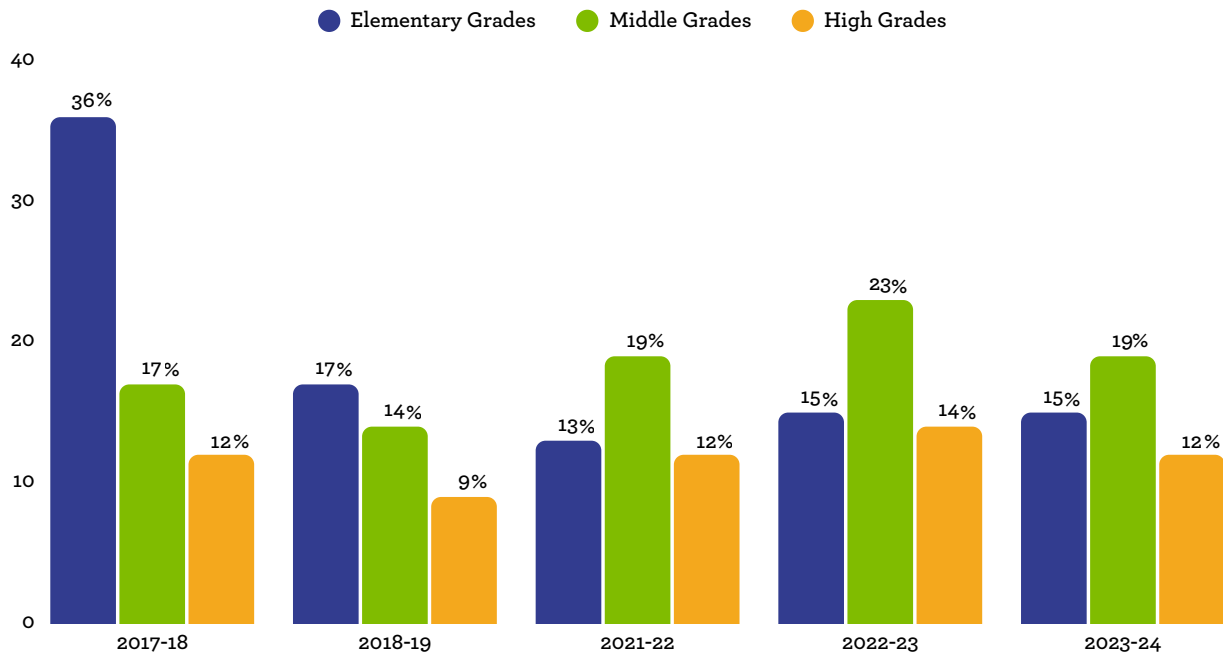


Exhibit 6.

The percentage of English learners that obtained Level 4 on the ELPAC in elementary grades dropped significantly after 2017-18.

Percent of ELs who obtained Level 4 on the ELPAC in SELA, by school-level



Many English learners in SELA are at-risk of becoming or are already long-term English learners.

Nearly half of English learners (ELs) in grades 3-5 in SELA are at risk of becoming long-term English learners (LTELs). A student is considered an at-risk LTEL if they have been enrolled in California schools for four to five years, score at the intermediate level or below on the ELPAC, and perform at the “Standard Not Met” level in English Language Arts on the state standardized assessment. These criteria signal that the student is not making expected progress in English language development and is on a path toward becoming an LTEL.

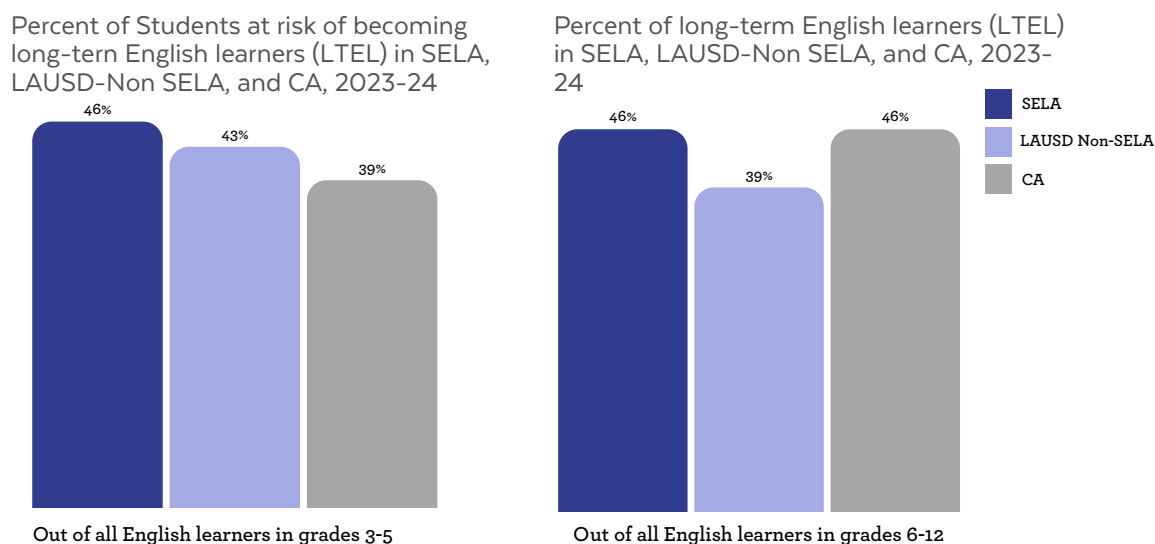
In 2023-24, 45% of all ELs in SELA met the criteria for at-risk LTELs, compared to 39% in non-SELA LAUSD schools and 37% statewide. While this reflects a significant improvement from a pandemic-era high of 63% in 2021-22, SELA’s rate remains elevated—nearly unchanged from 2016-17 (44%)—and notably higher than both district and state averages.

These persistent at-risk rates foreshadow the LTEL figures that emerge at the secondary level. Among students in grades 6-12, about half of all English learners (ELs) in SELA are classified as long-term English learners (LTELs). In 2023-24, 49% of ELs in SELA secondary schools had been enrolled for six or more years without making sufficient progress toward English proficiency. This compares to 42% in LAUSD non-SELA schools and 44% statewide (see Exhibit 7). Like the at-risk rate, this figure marks a sharp decline from 82% in 2021-22 and 78% in 2018-19 before the COVID-19 pandemic.

These persistent patterns point to a systemic challenge. The high proportion of LTELs in SELA’s middle and high schools suggests that many students are not receiving the instructional support required to meet grade-level expectations in English. Contributing factors may include: low-quality or inconsistent services in elementary grades; English instruction that fails to build the academic vocabulary needed to access core content; insufficient time spent on grade-level work; chronic absenteeism; and a shortage of teachers trained to effectively support ELs.¹⁶

Exhibit 7.

English learners in SELA are more likely to be at-risk long-term English learners in grades 3-5 than ELs in LAUSD and CA, and more likely to be long-term English learners in grades 6-12 than ELs in LAUSD



¹⁶ Buenrostro, M. and Maxwell-Jolly, J. (2021). *Renewing our promise: Research and recommendations to support California's Long-term English Learners*. Californians Together.

How well are SELA schools supporting multilingual learners?

Ensuring that all multilingual learners succeed across academic subjects is critical to building an equitable education system. All multilingual learners, including English learners (ELs), deserve access to rigorous coursework across the full curriculum, along with support to excel and demonstrate progress in their overall achievement. With the right supports in place, ELs can achieve at high levels.

Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) students are expected to perform on par with their English-only peers—and on average, they outperform them in both English and math.¹⁷ This section summarizes proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA) and math, disaggregated by language acquisition status: ELs, RFEP students, and English-only students. It highlights current outcomes and trends over time, with attention to emerging gaps and areas of progress between SELA, LAUSD, and statewide averages.

Few English learners in SELA are on grade level in ELA or math, and achievement gaps widen as students move through school.

In ELA, just 12% of ELs in elementary school are on grade level, dropping to 3% in middle school and 5% in high school. Math outcomes are similarly low, with 14% of ELs on grade level in elementary school, but only 2% in middle school and 3% in high school (see Exhibit 8). Across all grades, only 9% of ELs in SELA are on grade level in ELA and only 10% are on grade level in math. Results across all grades mirror outcomes for ELs across LAUSD and the state.

Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) students in SELA outperform their English-only peers in English and math—especially in elementary grades.

In ELA, 57% of RFEP students in elementary school are on grade level, compared to 37% of English-only students. This advantage narrows in middle school (42% vs. 37%) and remains slightly higher in high school (55% vs. 51%).

In math, RFEP students also outperform English-only students in elementary school (48% vs. 34%) and middle school (22% vs. 20%), but perform at the same level in high school (16% for both groups).

MLLs At-A-Glance

- **There are 209,529 English learners in Los Angeles County.**¹⁸
- **20% of the state's ELs are in Los Angeles County.**¹⁹
- **In Los Angeles, 412,000 children have at least one non-citizen parent.**²⁰

17. Hill, L., Weston, M., and Hayes, J. (January 2014). *Reclassification of English learner students in California*. Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC).
18. "Title III English Learner Student Demographics - Multilingual Learners (CA Dept of Education)," 2018. Ca.Gov. 2018. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ml/eldemographics.asp>.
19. "Title III English Learner Student Demographics - Multilingual Learners (CA Dept of Education)," 2018. Ca.Gov. 2018. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ml/eldemographics.asp>.
20. "Immigrants in California." 2026. Public Policy Institute of California. January 14, 2026. <https://www.ppic.org/publication/immigrants-in-california/>.

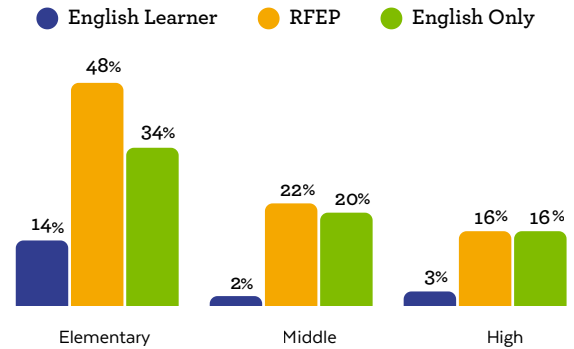
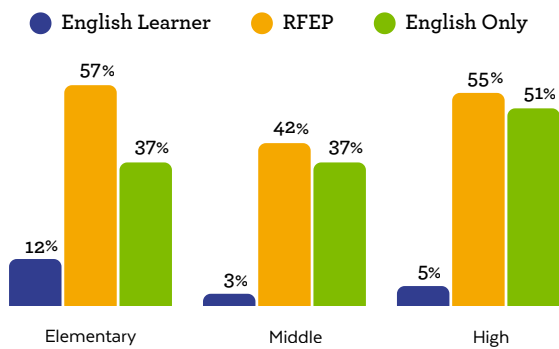
Compared to their peers in other LAUSD schools and statewide, RFEP students in SELA outperform in ELA only at the elementary level but lag behind in middle and high school. In math, RFEP students in SELA perform comparably to RFEP students elsewhere in elementary grades, but fall behind in later grades. Since 2016-17, SELA’s multilingual learners have made strong early gains in English in elementary school, but that progress has slowed in middle school and declined in high school (see Exhibit C in the Appendix).

Exhibit 8.

Few English learners in SELA are on grade level in English and math in elementary and even fewer in middle and high. Reclassified fluent English proficient (RFEP) students in SELA outperform English only students across all grade levels.

Percentage of students on grade level in English by language acquisition status, SELA schools, 2023-2024

Percentage of students on grade level in math by language acquisition status, SELA schools, 2023-2024





How well are SELA schools preparing multilingual learners for college and career?

For multilingual learners, college and career readiness requires not only academic preparation or instructional support but also equitable access to the coursework and programs that shape long-term success. While many multilingual students aspire to higher education and meaningful careers, systemic barriers continue to limit their participation in critical opportunities. Access to rigorous coursework, such as California’s A-G course sequence, which is required for admission to public four-year universities, remains unequal. Multilingual learners are consistently underrepresented among A-G completers due to factors such as limited course availability, scheduling conflicts, and insufficient academic support.²¹ Additionally, opportunities to strengthen college and career readiness through Advanced Placement (AP) and Career Technical Education (CTE) programs are often out of reach. AP courses offer access to college-level curriculum and can strengthen college applications, while CTE programs equip students with industry-relevant skills that align with labor market demands. Yet multilingual learners frequently face barriers to both, and are often tracked into lower-level vocational programs that restrict their future opportunities.²²

Even when multilingual learners complete required coursework, significant barriers remain in the transition to college. Postsecondary readiness also depends on access to advising, guidance through application processes, and support navigating complex systems. Multilingual students, particularly English learners (ELs), often lack the academic counseling and proactive interventions needed to successfully bridge the gap between high school and higher education.²³ This gap is driven by multiple structural barriers, including high counselor-to-student ratios that limit individualized advising, and counseling systems that do not focus on proactive college planning. EL students are not always systematically prioritized in college readiness tracking, which can result in delayed identification of missing A-G requirements. Analyses from large districts like LAUSD highlight persistent gaps in academic counseling and support services for these students, leaving many without the resources to translate their academic potential into postsecondary enrollment.²⁴ Without targeted and sustained support, multilingual learners risk falling behind their peers despite their ability and motivation to succeed.

21. Hurtt, A., Reed, S., Lee, P., and Kurlaender, M. (2023, July). [Addressing inequities in college preparatory course-taking](#). Policy Analysis for California Education; Gallegos, E., and Willis, D. J. (2024). [Most California high school seniors shut out of even applying to the state's universities](#). EdSource.
22. Boochever, A., Reed, S., and Kurlaender, M. (2023). [Career Technical Education among California high school graduates](#). Policy Analysis for California Education; Sugarman, J. (2023). [Unlocking opportunities: Supporting English learners' equitable access to career and technical education](#). Migration Policy Institute.
23. Shapiro, S. (2022, February). [Building better bridges into higher education for English learners](#). New America; Blog post.
24. EdTrust West. (2024). [From Policies to Practice: Paving the Path to College Readiness for Students of Color in LAUSD](#).

This section examines key indicators of college and career readiness among SELA EL students in high school. It compares SELA outcomes to those of LAUSD non-SELA schools and statewide benchmarks, offering insight into how effectively SELA high schools are preparing multilingual learners for postsecondary education and career pathways.

SELA English learners have high graduation rates but only 5 out of 10 are eligible to apply for a UC and CSU.

In SELA, 8 out of 10 (76%) EL high school students graduated on time in 2023-24. Only half of those EL graduates (53%) were eligible to apply to a UC/CSU—well above the state average for ELs (30%) but behind ELs in other LAUSD schools (60%). This signals that while SELA students are graduating, too many are still being left without a clear path to a four-year university. However, this represents a 14-point increase in A-G completion among SELA ELs since 2016-17, compared to a 10-point increase across non-SELA LAUSD schools and a 4-point increase statewide. Most of this growth has occurred since 2020-21, suggesting recent improvements in coursework access and support for SELA ELs post-pandemic.

Exhibit 10.

While English learners in SELA have high graduation rates, only half of those graduates are eligible to apply for a UC/CSU.

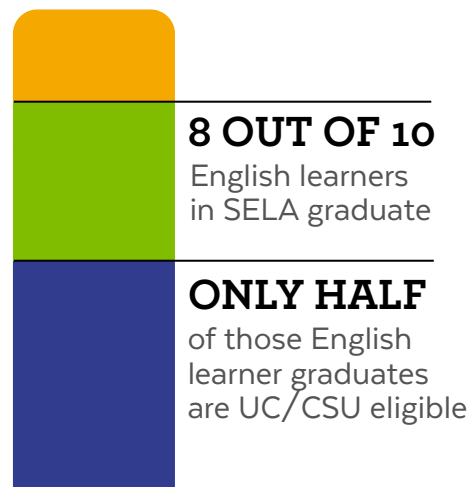
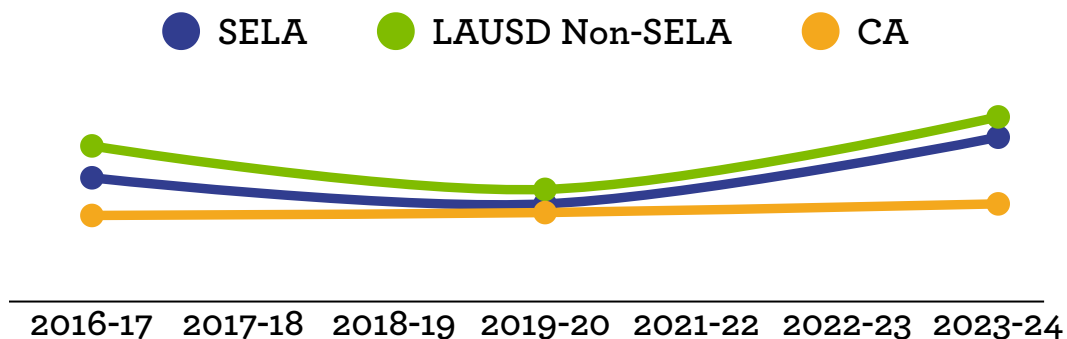


Exhibit 11.

SELA English learners have made considerable progress in UC/CSU eligibility since 2016-17.

Percent of English learners eligible to apply to a UC/CSU





SELA English learners have high graduation rates but only 5 out of 10 are eligible to apply for a UC and CSU.

The State Seal of Biliteracy is an award—denoted by a gold seal on a student’s high school diploma or transcript—that recognizes a student’s high level of proficiency in English and another language. It serves as a valuable credential that affirms students’ bilingualism and biliteracy, strengthens college applications, and enhances employment opportunities. This recognition also affirms the linguistic assets that multilingual learners bring to their schools and communities. However, many districts face challenges in ensuring equitable access to the Seal, especially for students who lack sustained academic language development or are not informed about eligibility early enough in their schooling.²⁵

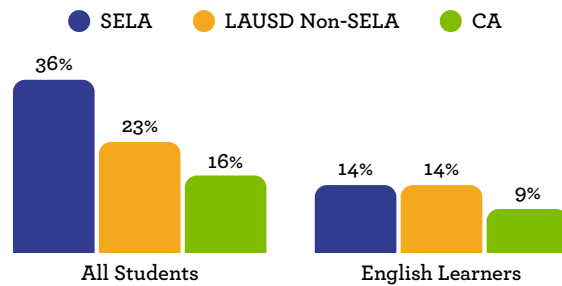
In 2023-24, 36% of SELA high school graduates earned the State Seal of Biliteracy—more than double the statewide average (16%) and significantly higher than in non-SELA LAUSD schools (23%) (see Exhibit 12). This rate has increased by 17 percentage points since 2016-17. SELA has consistently outperformed both the district and the state since 2016-17, suggesting a strong local emphasis on helping students attain the Seal.

Among ELs, only 14% of SELA graduates earned the Seal in 2023-24, slightly above the statewide rate for ELs (9%) and comparable to non-SELA LAUSD schools (14%) (see Exhibit 12). While annual changes have fluctuated, overall Seal attainment among SELA ELs has nearly tripled since 2016-17, when only 5% earned it. Despite a large gap between EL and all student Seal attainment in SELA (14% vs. 36%), both groups now outperform their peers statewide. Continued efforts to expand targeted opportunities for ELs could help close the remaining gap.

Exhibit 12.

More than a third of SELA graduates earn a State Seal of Biliteracy but only 1 in 10 SELA EL graduates do so.

Percent of graduates with State Seal of Biliteracy.



25. Stavelly, Z. (2024). [How and why to get a State Seal of Biliteracy: Quick guide](#). EdSource.

Figure B. How to get a State Seal of Biliteracy²⁶

Requirements for non-English learners	Requirements for English learners
<p>You must either complete coursework: Complete a four-year course of study in a world language at the high school or college level, earn an overall GPA of at least 3.0 in all courses, AND demonstrate oral proficiency comparable to that required to pass an Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) exam.</p> <p>OR take one of four tests:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pass a world language AP exam with a score of 3 or higher 2. Pass an IB exam with a score of 4 or higher 3. Pass both an ACTFL Writing Proficiency Test (WPT) and an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) with scores of intermediate, mid or higher 4. Pass an exam approved by your district that meets the rigor of a four-year high school course of study in the language and assesses speaking, reading and writing at a proficient level or higher. 	<p>You must either complete coursework: Complete all English language arts requirements for graduation with an overall GPA of at least 3.0 in those classes.</p> <p>OR take one of four tests:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pass the California state standardized test (California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress) for English language arts in 11th grade at or above the “standard met” achievement level 2. Pass an English Advanced Placement exam (AP English Language, AP English Literature, or AP Seminar) with a score of 3 or higher 3. Pass an English International Baccalaureate (IB) exam with a score of 4 or higher 4. Achieve a score of 480 or above on the evidence-based reading and writing section of the SAT <p>AND, if you are an English learner, you must attain an oral language composite score of level 4 on the English Language Proficiency Assessment for California (ELPAC).</p>

Too few SELA graduates—especially English learners—access rigorous coursework and postsecondary pathways.

Very few English learners pass at least two AP exams or complete a Career Technical Education (CTE) pathway. In 2023-24, only 3% of SELA EL graduates passed at least two AP exams and only 2% completed a CTE pathway. These rates are comparable to those among ELs in other LAUSD schools and statewide (see Exhibit 13).

A gap persists between the percentage of EL graduates and all graduates in SELA who complete key college and career readiness pathways. In 2023-24, 12% of all SELA graduates passed at least two AP exams, and 8% completed a CTE pathway. This disparity highlights the need for stronger support systems to help ELs access and succeed in both advanced coursework and CTE pathways.

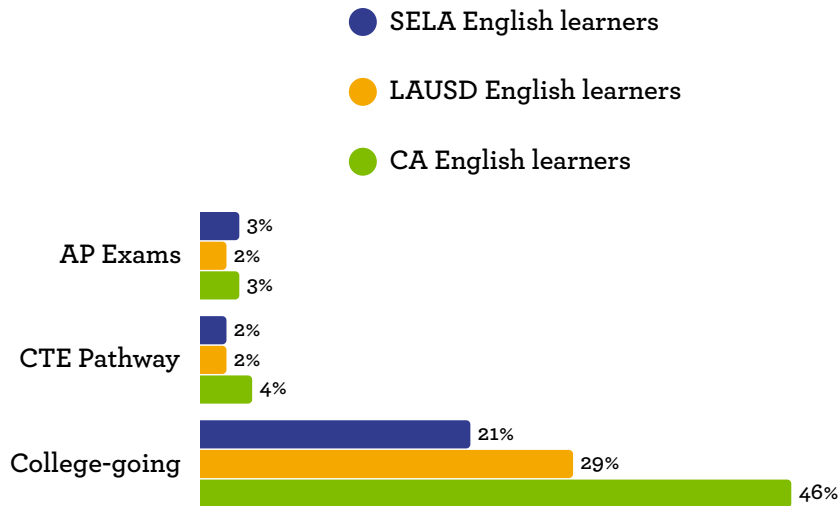
Only two in ten English learners in SELA go to college, significantly fewer than their peers in LAUSD and statewide. Only 21% of SELA EL graduates enrolled in college within a year of graduation in 2021-22, compared to 29% in LAUSD non-SELA schools and 46% statewide (see Exhibit 13). College-going rates for SELA ELs have stagnated since the pandemic, falling short of their 2019-20 peak of 31%.

²⁶ Staveland, Z. (2024). *How and why to get a State Seal of Biliteracy: Quick guide*. EdSource.

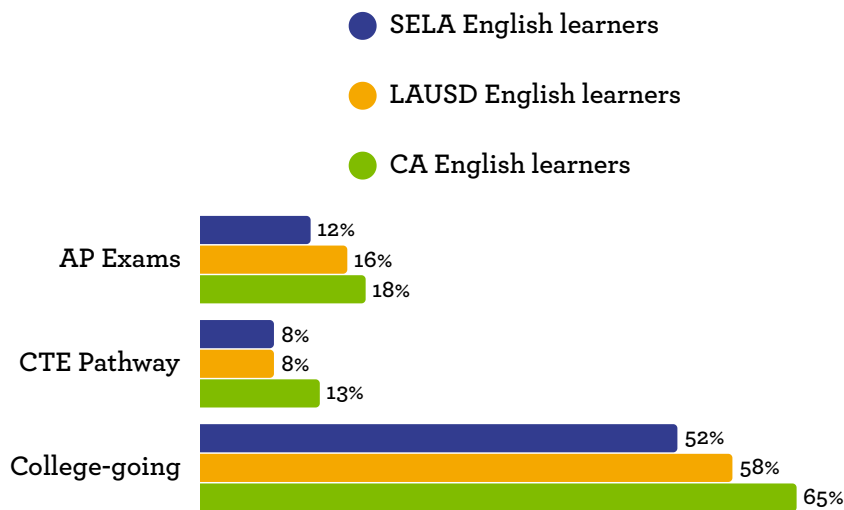
Exhibit 13.

Very few English learners in SELA, LAUSD, and across the state pass at least 2 AP exams or complete a CTE pathway. SELA ELs have much lower college-going rates compared to other ELs.

Percentage of English learners passing AP exams, completing a CTE pathway, or enrolling in college within 12 months, 2021-22



Percentage of all graduates passing AP exams, completing a CTE pathway, or enrolling in college within 12 months, 2021-22



Among all SELA graduates, 53% enrolled in a postsecondary institution within 12 months—six percentage points lower than the non-SELA LAUSD average (59%) and statewide average (59%) (see Exhibit 13).

The persistent and widening gap in college enrollment between SELA’s ELs and the overall student population—28 percentage points in 2021-22—underscores systemic barriers facing multilingual learners, even as graduation and UC and CSU eligibility rates improve. It is important to note, however, that these gaps also persist across LAUSD and the state. These findings point to the urgent need for more robust college advising, application support, and culturally responsive guidance tailored to ELs to ensure they can fully benefit from expanded academic preparation.

Improving English learners’ access to rigorous coursework and postsecondary pathways is critical to their long-term economic mobility and to meeting workforce needs across California. Multilingualism is a valuable asset across sectors, particularly in healthcare, where language proficiency and cultural competence directly improve patient outcomes. California continues to face a well-documented shortage of Latino/a physicians, and similar disparities exist in mental health, where only 4.4% of licensed psychologists identify as Latino/a.²⁷ Language access gaps further compound these inequities; a 2015 study found that in California there are only 62.1 Spanish-speaking physicians per 100,000 residents. Expanding pathways that support multilingual students to develop advanced academic and professional language skills is therefore essential—not only for their individual economic opportunity, but for building a workforce capable of providing culturally and linguistically responsive care in diverse communities.

What are dual-language immersion programs and how accessible are these programs in SELA?

Dual Language Immersion (DLI) programs represent one of the most promising educational strategies for multilingual learners in California because they simultaneously build English proficiency while continuing the development of students’ home languages.²⁸ By integrating instruction in both English and students’ home languages, these programs promote bilingualism, biliteracy, academic achievement, and long-term economic opportunity.

Expanding access to high-quality DLI programs is central to advancing educational equity for English learners (ELs) and preparing more students to become multilingual. Extensive research confirms that dual immersion programs support both academic success and sustained linguistic development for multilingual learners. Students who participate in well-implemented DLI models often demonstrate stronger academic performance, higher reclassification rates, and long-term advantages in higher education and career pathways.²⁹

Effective dual immersion programs share several core features, including coherent K-12 pathways, strong leadership, active family and community engagement, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and well-prepared bilingual teachers.³⁰ Programs that successfully integrate both designated and integrated English Language Development (ELD) ensure that ELs continue to develop both academic English and biliteracy without falling behind in content knowledge.³¹

Despite growing interest, equitable access to dual immersion remains a persistent challenge. In many districts, English-proficient students are often prioritized for enrollment, while ELs—who stand to benefit most from bilingual instruction—are underrepresented.³² Ensuring that ELs have meaningful access to high-quality DLI programs will require intentional policy design, meaningful family engagement, targeted investments, and consistent monitoring to close existing gaps.

27. Hamp, A., Stamm, K., Lin, L., & Christidis, P. (2016, September). 2015 APA survey of psychology health service providers. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/workforce/publications/15-health-service-providers/report.pdf>

28. "Dual Language Immersion (DLI) Program - Multilingual Learners (CA Dept of Education)." 2020. Ca.Gov. 2020. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ml/edgedli.asp>

29. WestEd. (2024). *Dual Language Immersion Programs: The State of Current Research*; Williams, C. P., Meek, S., Marcus, M., and Zabala, J. (2023). *Ensuring equitable access to dual-language immersion programs: Supporting English learners' emerging bilingualism*. The Century Foundation.

30. SEAL. (2023). *California is Pushing for Dual Language Education, and for Good Reason*.

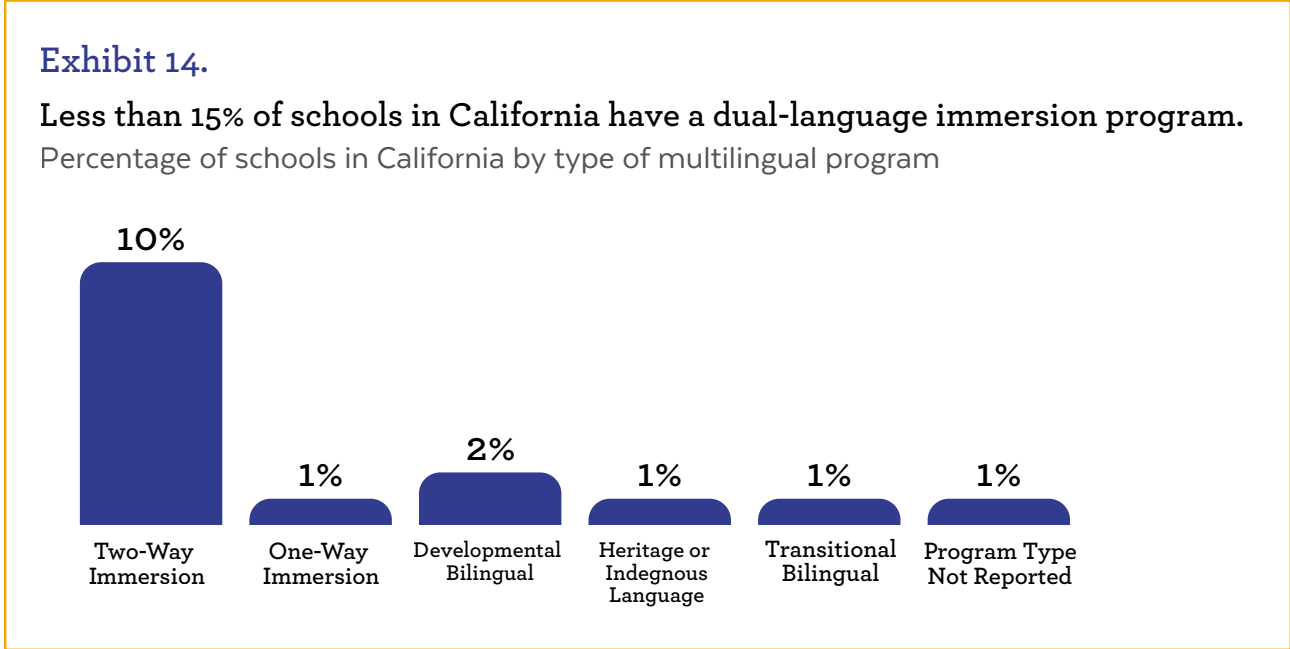
31. Staveley, Z. (2023). *How well do dual-immersion programs serve English learners?* EdSource.

32. Mathewson, T.G. (2025). *California wants more kids in bilingual classes — but won't spend enough to expand them*. CalMatters



Access to dual-language immersion in California remains limited and uneven despite state support.

Fewer than 15% of schools in California offer DLI to their students (see Exhibit 14). Two-way immersion programs—widely recognized as the most effective models for EL language development—are available in only 10% of schools in California. Fewer than half of ELs in California currently participate in bilingual or dual immersion programs, despite strong evidence of their benefits.³³ See Figure C for the descriptions of the types of DLI programs and other types of multilingual programs.



33. Buenrostro, M. (2024). *The state of English learners in California public schools*. Californians Together.

Figure C. Types of Multilingual Programs in California

Two-Way Immersion provides instruction in English and another language instruction for native speakers of English and native speakers of another language. The goals of these programs are language proficiency and academic achievement in students’ first and second languages, and cross-cultural understanding.

One-Way Immersion provides instruction in English and another language for non-speakers of the other language, with the goals of language proficiency and academic achievement in English and the other language, and cross-cultural understanding.

Developmental Bilingual provides instruction for English learners utilizing English and students’ native language for literacy and academic instruction, with the goals of language proficiency and academic achievement in students’ first and second languages.

Heritage Language or Indigenous Language provides instruction in English and another language for non-English speakers or students with limited literacy skills in their first language. Indigenous language programs support endangered minority languages in which students may have limited receptive and no productive skills.

Transitional Bilingual provides instruction for English learners utilizing English and students’ native language for literacy and academic instruction, with the goals of language proficiency and academic achievement in English. Students typically transition to “English only” instruction by third grade.

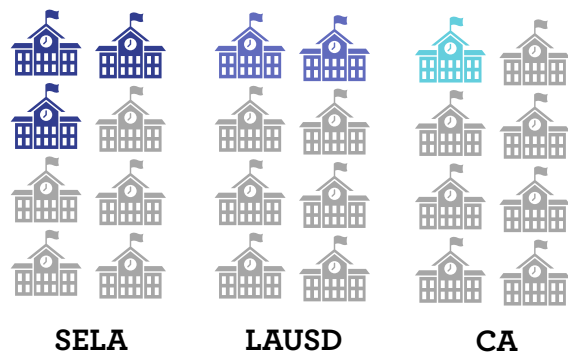
More SELA schools offer dual-language programs—but few English learners are enrolled

Students in SELA are more likely to have access to a dual-language program compared to students in LAUSD and state-wide. In SELA, 34% (33 schools) of 98 schools offer a dual-language program, while 22% of schools in LAUSD and 15% of schools throughout California offer a dual-language program (see Exhibit 15).

However, only one in 10 English learners in SELA are enrolled in a dual-language program. The availability of programs does not guarantee access—just 7% (4,083) of all SELA students and 12% (1,614 students) of all SELA ELs are enrolled in dual-language programs.

Exhibit 15.

Over a third of schools (34%) in SELA offer a dual-language program— compared to only 22% of schools in LAUSD and 15% of schools across California.



Almost all of the 33 schools in SELA with dual-language programs offer two-way immersion programs in Spanish for elementary grades. Nearly all dual-language programs (97%) in SELA are two-way immersion models, designed for both ELs of one other language and fluent English speakers to develop proficiency in each other's languages (see Exhibit 16). One school offers a one-way immersion program and a developmental bilingual program, which are intended for only English speakers or ELs, respectively.

Ninety-seven percent of schools in SELA with a dual-language program have a program in Spanish and one school has a program in Arabic. Among schools with dual-language programs, 82% are elementary schools and 9% are middle schools (see Exhibit 16). An additional 9% are K-8 or K-12 schools, but their multilingual programs serve students only through grade 8. Currently, no high school students in SELA have access to a multilingual program.

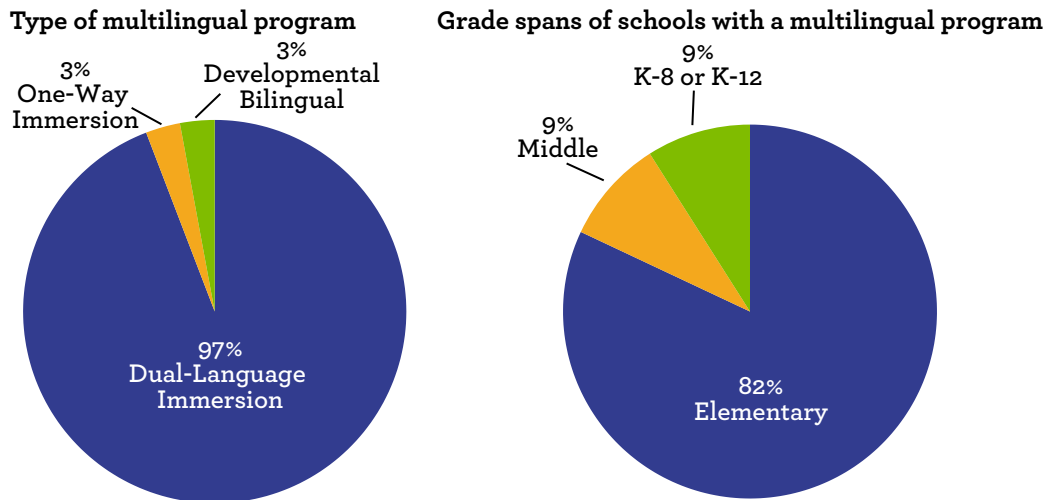
This is a problem because, despite increased availability of dual-language programs in SELA, few English learners are enrolled in them. This gap indicates that access to these programs is not equitably reaching the students they are intended to serve. As a result, many English learners are not benefiting from opportunities to become multilingual and are missing out on access to long-term social and economic benefits that are associated with knowing more than one language.

Of the 13,421 English learners in SELA, only 1 in 8 are currently enrolled in a dual-language program.

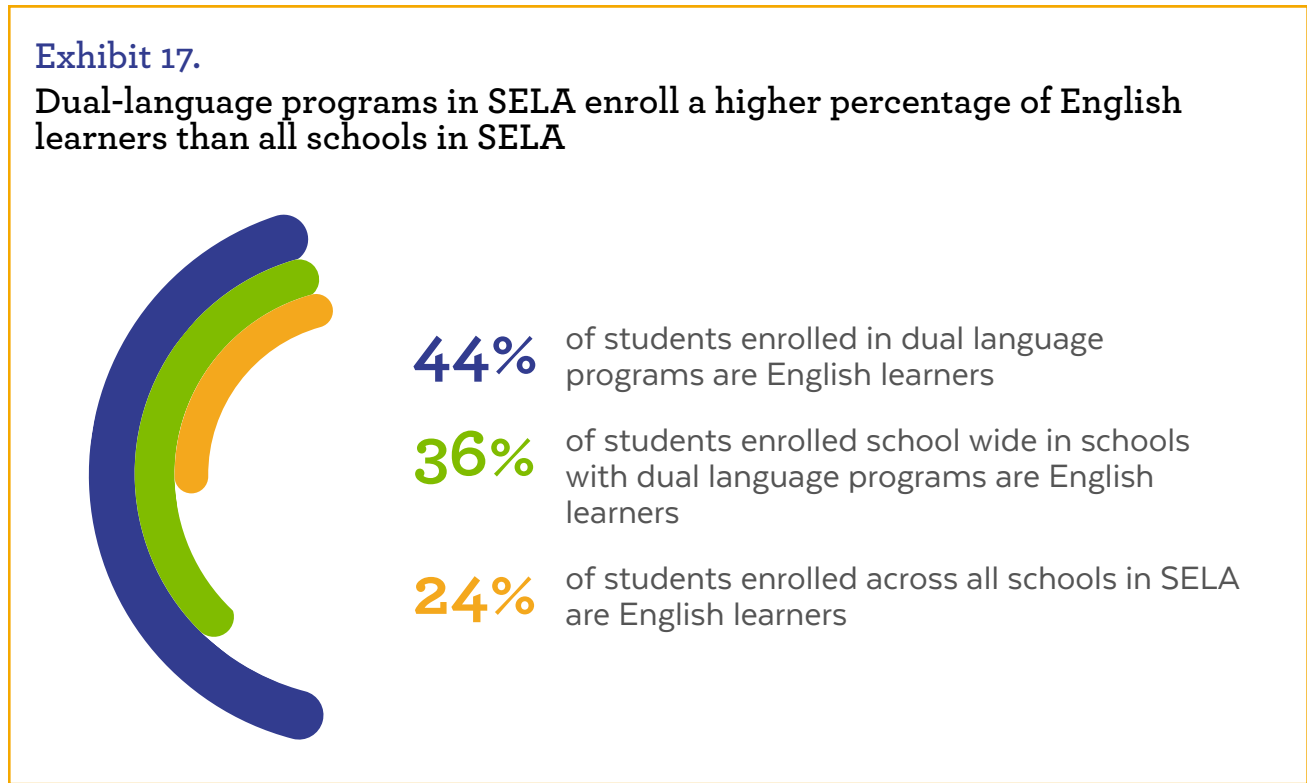
Exhibit 16.

Almost all multilingual programs in SELA are intended for both native speakers of English and Spanish

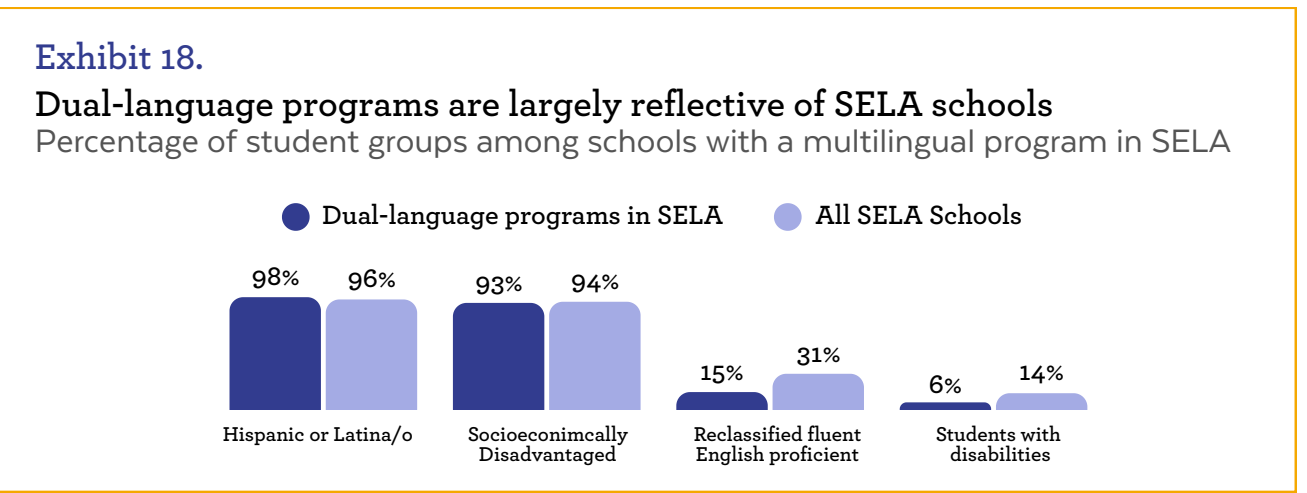
Percentage of schools with a multilingual program by type, language, and school level of the program



Nevertheless, dual-language programs in SELA appear to prioritize English learner enrollment. ELs make up 44% of all students enrolled in dual-language programs in SELA—significantly higher than the percentage of ELs enrolled in the same schools outside of these programs (36%) and higher than the percentage of ELs across all SELA schools (24%) (see Exhibit 17).



Aside from the higher proportion of English learners, the demographic makeup of students in dual-language programs closely mirrors that of all SELA schools. Among students in dual-language programs, 98% are Latina/o and 93% are low-income. However, a smaller percentage of Reclassified Fluent English Proficient (RFEP) students (15%) and students with disabilities (6%) are enrolled in these programs, compared to 31% and 14%, respectively, across all SELA schools. See Exhibit 18.



Within the same schools, students enrolled in dual-language programs outperform their peers who are not enrolled in those programs.

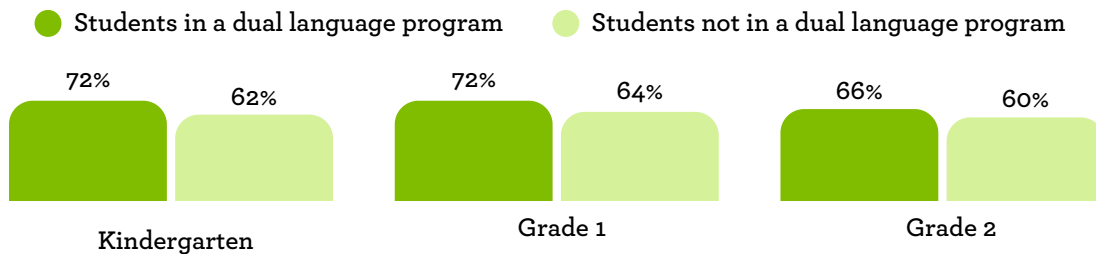
In this analysis we use Dual-Language Achievement (DLA) performance indicators to compare students in dual-language programs to their peers not in a dual-language program within the same SELA schools. Specifically, we compare the average percentage of students meeting early literacy benchmarks, the percentage of students on grade level in ELA and math on the SBAC, and the percentage of ELs achieving Level 4 on the ELPAC. It is important to note that data from the early literacy assessment and SBAC are reported for all students and are not disaggregated by EL status. The findings are intended to highlight the potential benefits of dual-language programs, though caution should be used when generalizing their impact due to data limitations.

On average, a higher percentage of students enrolled in dual-language programs in SELA meet early literacy benchmarks compared to their peers in the same schools who are not enrolled in such programs. Seven out of 10 students (72%) in dual-language programs met early literacy benchmarks in Kindergarten and Grade 1, on average, which is 8-10 percentage points higher than the percentage of students in the same schools who were not enrolled in a dual-language program (see Exhibit 19). Six out of 10 second graders (66%) in dual-language programs met early literacy benchmarks compared to 60% of students not in dual-language programs, on average.

Exhibit 19.

**Dual-language programs are largely reflective of SELA schools
Percentage of student groups among schools with a multilingual program in SELA**

Average percentage of students meeting early literacy benchmarks in SELA schools with a dual-language program

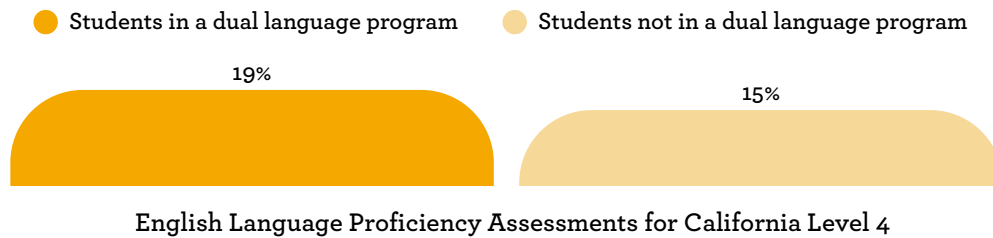


On average, a slightly higher percentage of English learners in dual-language programs in SELA attained well developed English skills on the ELPAC compared to English learners in the same school who are not in dual-language programs. Nineteen percent of ELs in dual-language programs in SELA attained level 4 on the ELPAC, compared to 15% of ELs in the same schools who are not in dual-language programs.

Exhibit 20.

English learners in dual-language programs are slightly more likely to have well developed English skills compared to English learners not in dual-language programs

Average percentage of students that attained Level 4 on the English Language Proficiency Assessment for California in SELA schools with a dual-language program

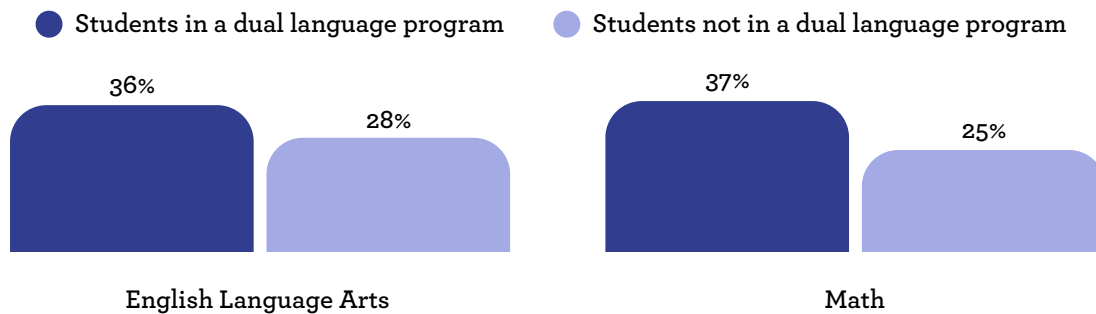


On average, students enrolled in dual-language programs in SELA are more likely to meet grade level standards in ELA and math compared to students in the same school not enrolled in dual-language programs. The percentage of students in dual-language programs who met ELA grade level standards (36%) was eight percentage points higher than students who were not enrolled in the program (28%). In addition, 37% of students in dual-language programs met math grade level standards, 12 percentage points higher than students who were not enrolled in the program (25%).

Exhibit 21.

In the same schools, dual-language students outperform peers in ELA and math.

Average percentage of students that met grade level standards on Smarter Balanced Assessments in English language arts and math in SELA schools with a dual-language program





Recommendations

SELA has the cultural strength, capacity, and unrealized potential to be a leader and model for how to best support multilingual learners. Consistent with ABC's commitment to data-driven, community-informed policy, the following recommendations were developed in partnership with 25 Southeast Los Angeles parents of current and former multilingual learners. These are recommendations for district and school leaders in Southeast Los Angeles (SELA) schools to leverage the region's strengths and address unmet needs for multilingual learners.

1

Intentionally engage families, promote benefits, and raise awareness of dual language immersion programs so that English learners have more equitable access. Too few English learners are currently enrolled in dual language immersion programs in SELA despite having the most to gain from these programs. Spanish-speaking families often miss out on existing programs due to limited school outreach and persistent myths about the challenges of learning more than one language simultaneously. Local district and school leaders in SELA should design an outreach strategy that intentionally engages local community-based organizations and Spanish-speaking families, including those with children who are 0-5 years old, to ensure they are aware of DLI programs and highlight the benefits of these programs for multilingual learners.

2

Set goals, track progress, and invest in resources to meet the needs of all multilingual learners. Local district and school leaders serving SELA should establish their own aspirational goals for multilingual learners, particularly for English learners (ELs) and long-term English learners (LTELs), with accountability measures in place. **Leaders should monitor and track progress toward these goals using disaggregated data and publicly share these goals and progress with schools and families.** Goals should focus on academic achievement, English language proficiency, access to bilingual pathways, and enrollment in rigorous coursework. Data should be disaggregated by different EL typologies to highlight the distinct needs and progress of different student groups.

3

Strengthen systems to accelerate English language development and reduce the number of long-term English learners (LTELs). English learners can achieve at high levels with the right support. School districts should provide targeted, tiered Integrated and Designated English Language Development (ELD) opportunities, with interventions differentiated to meet the needs of newcomers, at-risk LTELs, and current LTELs. All staff, both certificated and classified, should receive ongoing training in culturally responsive practices and the social-emotional needs of newcomers, ensuring that language development is embedded across all subject areas through integrated ELD strategies, not limited to ELD specialists alone. Adopting evidence-based curricula that combine language support with rigorous, grade-level content can further close opportunity gaps. To sustain this work long-term, districts should develop career pathways, including "grow your own" programs beginning in preschool and transitional kindergarten, to build a pipeline of teachers and staff who reflect the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their students.

4

Increase multilingual learners' access to rigorous coursework and college and career pathways, and provide adequate support. SELA school and district leaders should expand access to rigorous coursework and college/career pathways for multilingual learners, along with the supports necessary for success. This includes providing EL-focused guidance on A-G completion and financial aid beginning in middle school, identifying and removing barriers to EL participation in AP courses and CTE pathways, supporting more EL students in earning the State Seal of Biliteracy, and building in supports to help multilingual learners succeed academically. Support can include high-impact tutoring, adopting high quality instructional materials that center the needs of multilingual learners, and investing in counselors who can help multilingual learners navigate, partnering with the local community colleges to increase access to the wide variety of college and career pathways.

5

Expand access to dual-language immersion programs, including increased early education and high school programs. Dual language programs in SELA clearly demonstrate promising academic and linguistic outcomes for all students. Given SELA's large population of multilingual learners, expanding access to these programs from early childhood through high school would provide substantial benefits. Increasing availability at the high school level is especially important to ensure students can develop proficiency in more than one language beyond middle school. SELA schools should continue to prioritize recruiting and enrolling ELs in dual language programs.

6

Build partnerships to create pathways for preparing more multilingual educators. Addressing the multilingual teacher pipeline requires both recruiting and preparing new educators as well as supporting current teachers. Local leaders should establish partnerships among county offices of education, school districts, colleges and universities, and families to recruit bilingual staff and students into teaching careers. Opportunities that local leaders can leverage to expand and accelerate the preparation of multilingual educators include: Bilingual Teacher Professional Development Program (BTPDP), Bilingual Teacher Residencies, Pathways for Biliteracy Recipients.

7

Provide trauma-informed mental health supports tailored to multilingual learners and immigrant communities. Changes in federal immigration policy and increased enforcement activity are creating fear, stress, and instability for many multilingual learners, particularly those in immigrant and mixed-status families. SELA school and district leaders should expand access to culturally and linguistically responsive mental health services, and coordinate closely with each other and with local mental health service providers to ensure consistent support. Partnerships with trusted community-based organizations can help provide wraparound support, counseling, and referrals. Schools should also communicate with families, in their home language, about available mental health services and ensure support is accessible regardless of immigration status.

8

Expand Holistic Support Networks for Multilingual Learners in Chronically Under-Resourced Communities. SELA schools, community partners, and city and county departments should coordinate to connect multilingual learners across the region with after-school and recreational programs, mentorship opportunities, college and career readiness resources, and culturally affirming enrichment activities. These wraparound supports must be delivered through trusted, community-based organizations with experience serving youth in historically underinvested communities. Long-term, sustained investment in multilingual learners should reflect the "Care First, Jails Last" vision: when students have consistent access to academic skill-building, social connections, and leadership development, they are less likely to become justice-involved and more likely to thrive, both inside and outside the classroom.

Appendix: Methodology

We used the following publicly available data (sources listed in Figure A) to inform the report.

Figure A.

Indicator Type	Measure	Link to Source
School characteristics	School-level (elementary, middle, or high)	CDE public schools and districts data
	Traditional or charter type	
	Zip code or neighborhood	
Student enrollment demographics	Total enrollment	CDE Enrollment by School (1981-2022) and Census Day Enrollment Data (2023)
	Student enrollment of students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged	
	Student enrollment by race/ethnicity	
	Student enrollment by English language acquisition status	CDE Enrollment by ELAS, LTEL, and At-Risk by Grade
	English learner enrollment by language	CDE English Learners by Grade and Language
Academic Achievement	Students meeting or exceeding standards on the Smarter Balanced Assessment in English language arts and math	CDE California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) Smarter Balanced Assessments Research Files

Appendix: Methodology

Figure A. Continued

Indicator Type	Measure	Link to Source
College and Career Readiness	Four-year cohort graduation	CDE School Dashboard and Systems of Support - College/Career Indicators
	Four-year graduation cohort A-G completion (meeting UC-CSU entrance requirements)	
	Four-year graduation cohort who earned a State Seal of Biliteracy	
	Completed at least one CTE pathway	
	Scored 3 or higher on at least two Advanced Placement exams	
	Student enrollment in any postsecondary institution within 12 months of completing high school.	CDE College-Going Rate for High School Completers (12-month)
English Proficiency	Students who increased at least one performance level or maintained the level representing English language proficiency on the Summative English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC) between the prior and current year	CDE School Dashboard and Systems of Support - English Learner Progress Indicator
	Enrollment of students with long-term English learner (LTEL) English language acquisition status (ELAS)	CDE Enrollment by ELAS, LTEL, and At-Risk by Grade

Appendix: Methodology

Figure A. Continued

Indicator Type	Measure	Link to Source
Other Indicators	Students chronically absent (absent for 10% or more of the days they were expected to attend)	CDE Chronic Absenteeism
	Students suspended one or more times	CDE Suspension Data
	Students with continuous enrollment in one school without a disqualifying exit (student stability)	CDE Stability Rate Data
Access to dual language programs by program characteristics	Schools with a dual language program	CDE public schools and districts data
	Schools by dual language program type	CDE list of schools offering multilingual programs 2022-23
	Schools by language of dual language program and model type	LAUSD dual Language Education Programs Directory
Characteristics of students enrolled in dual language programs	All students enrolled in dual language programs, by the program characteristics	LAUSD Open Data Dashboard
	Students enrolled in dual language programs, by student characteristics	LAUSD Open Data Dashboard - School Profiles
Academic achievement of students enrolled in dual language programs	Students meeting early literacy benchmarks, Students meeting proficiency in ELA and math, and English learners meeting ELPAC performance Level 4	LAUSD Open Data Dashboard - School Profiles

School types: Some schools included in the sample serve a band of grades that do not align with CDE’s typical grade-banded breakdown. For schools in that category, enrollment, SBAC and ELPAC proficiency results were calculated into elementary, middle, and high school grade bands. For example, a K-8 school’s data would be included in the elementary school sample for their lower grades (K-5), and separately, in the middle school sample for their upper grades (6-8). Figure XX below shows the grade span cut points applied to determine school type.

Figure B. School type by grade levels

School Type	Included Grades
Elementary	K-5, K-6 (and no higher grade)
Middle	6-8, 5-8 (and no lower grade) 5-9 (no lower or higher grade) 6-9 (no higher grade)
High	9-12, 8-12 (no lower grade)

Figure C: Understanding English Proficiency Metrics and Outcomes for Multilingual Learners

To interpret academic outcomes for multilingual learners, it is essential to understand the systems California uses to measure English proficiency and language development. This overview highlights three key areas: (1) English Language Proficiency and the English Learner Progress Indicator (ELPI), (2) Long-Term English Learners (LTELs), and (3) Reclassification.

Together, these metrics provide critical context for interpreting English learners’ (ELs) academic performance across the elementary, middle, and high school grades. Understanding variation in ELPAC performance, LTEL prevalence, and reclassification rates is essential to evaluating progress and identifying systemic barriers to success for multilingual students.

1. English Language Proficiency and the ELPI

English proficiency plays a foundational role in student success. Academic English, which differs from conversational fluency, involves mastering vocabulary, syntax, and discourse needed for reading comprehension, writing, and critical thinking.³⁴ As highlighted by the Learning Policy Institute, ELA proficiency directly influences students’ ability to access rigorous coursework and impacts long-term educational trajectories.³⁵ Monitoring ELA proficiency among English learners is critical to identifying gaps in academic language development and ensuring students receive appropriate instructional support.³⁶

34. Center for Equity for English Learners. (2022). *Ensuring equity and excellence for English learners: An annotated bibliography for research, policy, and practice*.
35. Novicoff, S., Reardon, S. F., and Johnson, R. C. (2024). *California’s English learners and their long-term learning outcomes* [Brief]. Learning Policy Institute.
36. Umansky, I., and Santibañez, L. (2018). *Getting down to facts II: English learners. Charting their experiences and mapping their futures in California schools* [Policy brief]. Policy Analysis for California Education; Reed, S., Hurr, A., Hibel, J., and Garrett, D. (2022). *Serving English learners during the COVID-19 pandemic* [Report]. Policy Analysis for California Education.

The state uses two main measures to monitor proficiency:

- English Learner Progress Indicator (ELPI), which tracks annual progress on the English Language Proficiency Assessments for California (ELPAC). The ELPAC measures skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and classifies students into six performance bands.
- Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC) in English Language Arts (ELA), which assesses grade-level literacy proficiency.

California expects English learners to make consistent gains and reach full proficiency (Level 4) within five years. However, recent data show only half of English learners met these growth expectations in 2023.³⁷ These figures reflect systemic challenges and underscore the need for sustained investments in both integrated and designated English Language Development (ELD).³⁸

2. Long-Term English Learners (LTELs)

California tracks both Long-Term English Learners (grades 6–12) and “at-risk” LTELs (grades 3–5) to monitor students who are not making expected English proficiency gains. Students are considered LTELs if they have attended U.S. schools for six or more years without progressing on the ELPAC for at least two years. Students enrolled for four or five years who continue to score at the intermediate level or below on the ELPAC are categorized as “at-risk” LTELs.³⁹ This expanded tracking recognizes the importance of early identification and intervention for students whose language development is not progressing as expected.

Due to new legislation passed in 2022, California released disaggregated achievement data for long-term English learners and students at risk of becoming LTELs on statewide standardized tests in math, English language arts, and science for the first time in 2022–23. LTELs consistently perform worse on SBAC in English, math, and science than peers who have been ELs for fewer years.⁴⁰ They are more likely to be socioeconomically disadvantaged or identified for special education services. Research shows they often develop oral fluency but continue to struggle with academic writing and complex reading tasks.⁴¹

Importantly, most English learners can reach proficiency within 4–7 years if given high-quality, consistent ELD instruction.⁴² High LTEL rates are not inevitable—they are often the result of systemic instructional and policy shortcomings.⁴³

3. Reclassification

Reclassification marks the point at which English learners are deemed proficient and no longer require designated language support. To be reclassified in California, students must:

- Score a Level 4 on the ELPAC,
- Receive a teacher evaluation of curriculum mastery,
- Demonstrate comparable academic skills to English-only peers, and
- Participate in parent consultation.

37. Buenrostro, M. (2024). *The state of English learners in California public schools*. Californians Together.

38. Center for Equity for English Learners. (2022). *Ensuring equity and excellence for English learners: An annotated bibliography for research, policy, and practice*.

39. Buenrostro, M. (2024). *The state of English learners in California public schools*. Californians Together.

40. Buenrostro, M. (2024). *The state of English learners in California public schools*. Californians Together; Price, H., Burns, D., Loewe, S., Shields, P., Kaplan, J., and Lee, H. *Long-term English learners in California*. Learning Policy Institute; Staveland, Z. (2024). *Long-term English learners do worse on tests than peers with fewer years in U.S. schools, data shows*. EdSource.

41. Buenrostro, M. (2024). *The state of English learners in California public schools*. Californians Together; Center for Equity for English Learners. (2022). *Ensuring equity and excellence for English learners: An annotated bibliography for research, policy, and practice*; Price, H., Burns, D., Loewe, S., Shields, P., Kaplan, J., and Lee, H. *Long-term English learners in California*. Learning Policy Institute.

42. Price, H., Burns, D., Loewe, S., Shields, P., Kaplan, J., and Lee, H. *Long-term English learners in California*. Learning Policy Institute.

43. Briceno, A., and Bergey, R. (2022). *Implementing Policy: Navigating the English Learner Roadmap for Equity*. Journal for Leadership, Equity, and Research, 8(1).

Research consistently shows that reclassified students (RFEPs) tend to outperform both current ELs and English-only peers across academic measures.⁴⁴ Reclassification has also been linked to greater student engagement and confidence.⁴⁵

However, there is significant local variation in how districts apply the non-ELPAC criteria. Differences in how districts interpret and implement the four criteria—particularly for teacher evaluations and local assessments—can contribute to inconsistent access to reclassification opportunities.⁴⁶ In some cases, students may meet proficiency levels on the ELPAC but remain designated as English learners due to more restrictive local policies governing teacher recommendations or benchmark assessments.⁴⁷ In 2022, over 60% of California districts did not reclassify all students who scored Level 4, often due to additional local requirements.⁴⁸ These inconsistencies can delay reclassification, particularly for English learners with disabilities.

44. Umansky, I., and Santibañez, L. (2018). [Getting down to facts II: English learners. Charting their experiences and mapping their futures in California schools](#) [Policy brief]. Policy Analysis for California Education.

45. Lee, M. G., and Soland, J. G. (2022). [Does Reclassification Change How English Learners Feel About School and Themselves? Evidence From a Regression Discontinuity Design](#). Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 45(1), 27-51.

46. Hill, L., Lee, A., and Hayes, J. (2021). [Surveying the Landscape of California's English Learner Reclassification Policy](#). Public Policy Institute of California.

47. Betts, J., Hill, L., Bachofer, K., Hayes, J., Lee, A., & Zau, A. C. (2019). [English Learner Trajectories and Reclassification](#). Public Policy Institute of California; Laura Hill, L., Betts, J., Hopkins, M., Lavadenz, M., Bachofer, K., Hayes, J., Lee, A., Murillo, M. A., Vahdani, T., & Zau, A.C. (2019). [Academic Progress for English Learners: The Role of School Language Environment and Course Placement in Grades 6-12](#). Public Policy Institute of California.

48. Buenrostro, M. (2024). [The state of English learners in California public schools](#). Californians Together.

Acknowledgements

**AUTHORED BY PODER CONSULTING AND
ALLIANCE FOR A BETTER COMMUNITY**

A special thank you to the SELA community members who provided input for recommendations to advance multilingual learner success in the Los Angeles County region and Sobrato Philanthropies. The creation of this report would not have been possible without their support.

Join our mission



afabc.org



@afabc_la