

Inequalities in Postsecondary Attainment by English Learner Status: The Role of College-Level Course-Taking

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The role of English learner (EL) status in four-year college enrollment and bachelor’s degree completion among Houston Independent School District (HISD) high school graduates was examined in this report. Students were divided into four groups:

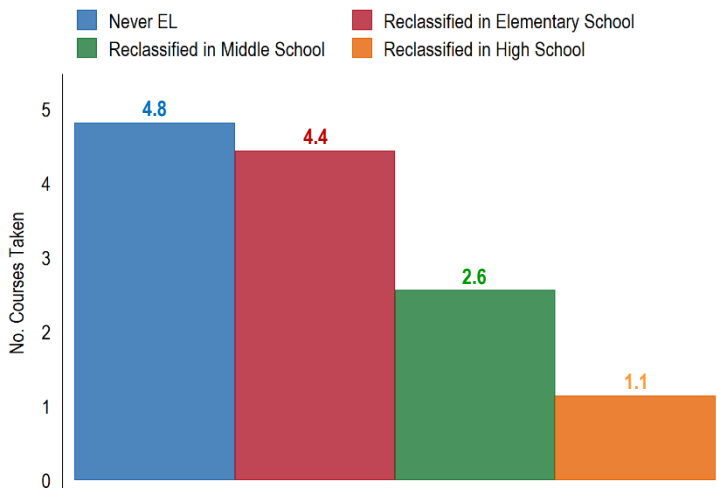
1. Students who were never classified as EL (“Never EL” students)
2. Former ELs reclassified during elementary school (grades kindergarten-five)
3. Former ELs reclassified during middle school (grades six-eight)
4. Former ELs reclassified during high school (grades nine-11) or still EL in 12th grade

Although differences in four-year college outcomes by EL status were large, they were related to differences in college-level course-taking during high school. If EL students took as many college-level courses as Never EL students, differences in four-year college enrollment between EL and Never EL students would reduce.

The full report is available at <https://kinder.rice.edu/research/inequalities-postsecondary-attainment-english-learner-status-role-college-level-course>

Key Findings

Figure 1: Junior and Senior Year College-Level Course-Taking by EL Status



Source: Figure 2 in full report.

Note: College-level courses were defined as the number of Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and academic dual credit courses taken in the 11th and 12th grades.

- Never EL students and EL students reclassified in elementary school took similar numbers of college-level courses during the junior and senior years of high school.
- EL students reclassified in middle and high school took fewer college-level courses than Never EL students and students reclassified in elementary school.
- EL students reclassified in high school took fewer college-level courses than students reclassified in middle school.

Note on the authors: Irina Chukhray, M.A. is currently a doctoral student at the University of California - Davis.

To increase four-year college enrollment among EL students, district policymakers and school practitioners should improve access to college-level coursework.

- EL students had lower rates of four-year college enrollment than Never EL students.

| EL Status | Four-Year College Enrollment Rate |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Never EL | 64% |
| Reclassified in Elementary School | 45% |
| Reclassified in Middle School | 28% |
| Reclassified in High School | 21% |

Source: Appendix B in full report.

- The difference in four-year college enrollment between EL and Never EL students was smallest for students reclassified in elementary school and largest for students reclassified in high school.
- If EL students took the same number of college-level courses as Never EL students, differences in four-year college enrollment between EL and Never EL students would reduce.*

Recommendations

- 1: Design ways in which EL students can receive advanced course content that can adequately prepare them for college
- 2: Ensure EL students have adequate access to advanced course content as early as middle school
- 3: Encourage EL students who meet a certain proficiency level in English reading, writing, speaking, and listening to take advanced courses
- 4: Integrate teacher recommendations into the course recommendation process
- 5: Have members of each school's Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) communicate with counselors and registrars about EL students' academic performance
- 6: Offer trainings for counselors and registrars on course-taking for EL students
- 7: Strengthen connections between staff in the Multilingual Education Department and the College Readiness Department
- 8: Help EL students reclassify early by identifying evidence-based instructional practices which can aid English language acquisition



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* Please see p. 12 of the full report for statistics and graphs.