ENGLISH LEARNER EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

A Case for Alternative Indicators by Havala Hanson



BACKGROUND AND

The tendency to see English learner (EL) students as a homogeneous group and inattention to the fate of former EL students have restricted educators' ability to respond to each group's different needs (Olsen, 2010). As a result, researchers and policymakers (e.g., Gwynne, Pareja, Ehrlich, & Allensworth, 2012) have called for new analyses to help identify key EL student groups, as well as describe differences in their experiences, so they can focus resources and target interventions.

Many school districts use early warning indicators (typically, a combination of attendance, course failures, GPA, and suspensions or expulsions) to identify and provide supports for students at risk of dropping out of school. There is insufficient evidence about the accuracy of early warning indicators for EL students, however. Further, although national data suggest EL students drop out of high school at higher rates than their peers (Kena et al., 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2015), these statistics do not capture the variation in dropout and graduation rates for different groups of EL students.

The six districts in this study are part of the Road Map Project, a collective impact initiative in the South King County area of Washington state that aims to double the number of students who are on track to graduate from college or earn a career credential by 2020. The Road Map Project uses two early warning indicators; students are considered at risk of dropping out if they have at least one course failure and six or more absences, or if they have at least one suspension or expulsion.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do graduation and dropout rates vary for students based on their EL status at the start of grade 9?
- What is the accuracy of early warning indicators for each student group?



Four- and five-year graduation rates and four-year dropout rates FINDINGS

Student group	Adjusted four- year graduation rate (%)	Adjusted five- year graduation rate (%)	Four-year dropout rate (%)
All students	70.8	77.2	5.4
Never–English learners	73.5	78.8	5.2
Ever–English learners	64.0	73.2	5.9
Current English learners	52.7	65.2	7.7
Newcomer	42.6	58.8	8.9
Established	61.2	70.5	6.7
Former English learners	75.3	81.2	4.0
Recently reclassified	69.4	76.4	8.8
Long-term proficient	76.4	82.1	3.1

Source: Authors' analysis of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and Road Map Project district data, 2004/05-2012/13.

The Road Map Project's early warning indicators were unable to accurately identify many future dropouts across the six districts and were especially poor for newcomer EL students. This is problematic because newcomer EL students had much lower graduation rates than other groups.

Odds ratios, precision, and sensitivity of the dropout indicators

ODDS RATIO (likelihood of triggering one or both indicators)	PRECISION (percentage of students identified as at risk in grade 9 who dropped out)	SENSITIVITY (percentage of student who dropped out who were identified as at risk in grade 9)
2.8***	10.3	45.0
3.2***	10.7	48.1
2.0***	9.2	37.8
1.8**	11.1	35.9
2.1*	15.5	24.1
1.9*	9.6	49.0
2.4**	7.1	41.5
1.0	8.7	31.6
3.4***	6.7	47.1
	(likelihood of triggering one or both indicators) 2.8*** 3.2*** 2.0*** 1.8** 2.1* 1.9* 2.4** 1.0	(likelihood of triggering one or both indicators) 2.8*** 10.3 3.2*** 10.7 2.0*** 9.2 1.8** 11.1 2.1* 1.9* 9.6 2.4** 7.1 1.0 8.7

* Significant at p < .05; ** significant at p < .01; *** significant at p < .001.

Source: Authors' analysis of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and Road Map Project district data, 2004/05-2012/13.

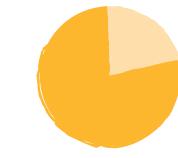


Graduation and dropout rates varied substantially across student groups. Differences among EL student groups were larger than differences between ever- and never-EL students. Long-term reclassified EL students had higher graduation rates than never-EL students, and newcomer EL students had the lowest graduation rates.



IMPLICATIONS

The sizable variation in graduation and dropout rates among EL student groups underscores the importance of regarding EL students as a heterogeneous group and attending to crucial variations in English proficiency development among student groups. Although the accuracy of the Road Map Project's early warning indicators was weak for all student groups, the results suggest a need for alternative indicators for some EL students—particularly newcomers.



SAMPLE

The sample comprised 9,595 students in six Road Map Project districts who began grade 9 in 2008/09.

- Ever–EL students: 2,652
- Current EL students: 1,333
- Newcomers (entered in grade 7 or later): 604
- Established (entered in grade 6 or earlier): 729
- Former EL students: 1,319
- Recently reclassified (proficient in grade 7 or later): 216
- Long-term reclassified (proficient in grade 6 or earlier): 1,103 Never–EL students (never classified as an English learner): 6,943



METHODS

Four- and five-year graduation rates and dropout rates were adjusted to include students who transferred into the Road Map Project districts after grade 9 and to exclude students who transferred to another school outside the region. The accuracy of the early warning indicators was estimated using logistic regression and post-hoc tests to calculate the precision (percentage of students who actually drop out among all those identified as at risk) and sensitivity (percentage of students who were identified as at risk and dropped out among all students who dropped out) of the indicators for each group of students.



OPPORTUNITIES TO SOAR

Advanced Course Enrollment and Performance of Students from Different Language Backgrounds



WHYTHIS STUDY?

Rigorous coursework in high school is important for postsecondary success, and all students should have access to and the opportunity to take advanced courses. Language minority students may be well-positioned to succeed in advanced courses (such as those found in International Baccalaureate programs), but they face unique challenges—high mobility rates, the need to learn academic content and English language skills simultaneously, etc.—that could leave some underprepared for advanced coursework.

Language minority students are a highly diverse group, and simple comparisons with English-only speakers may have limited value. This report clarifies differences in advanced course enrollment and performance by English learner status and language spoken, with an emphasis on the largest group: Spanish speakers.



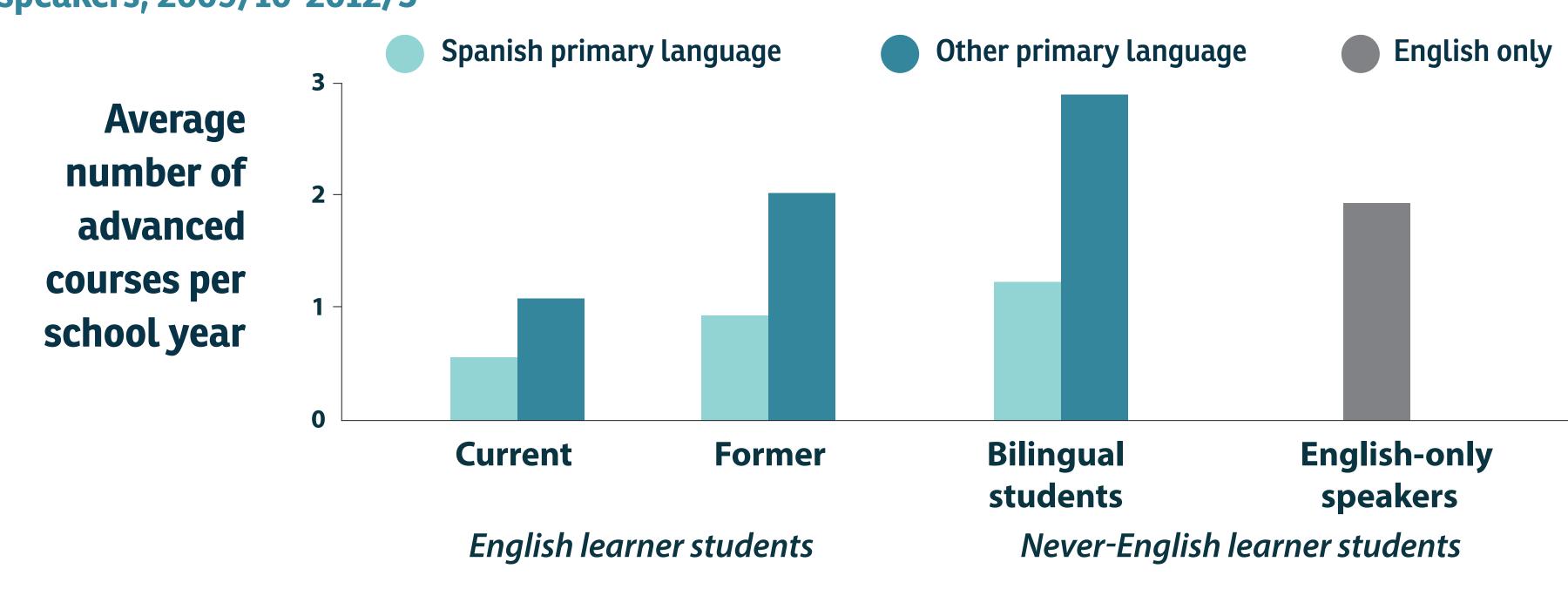
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1. How does advanced course enrollment vary by English learner status and primary language?
- 2. How much does prior academic performance account for differences in advanced course enrollment across groups?
- 3. How do the grades earned in advanced courses compare among students by English learner status and primary language?
- 4. How does the number of advanced courses offered vary between schools with a high percentage of Spanish-speaking students and schools with a low percentage of Spanish-speaking students?

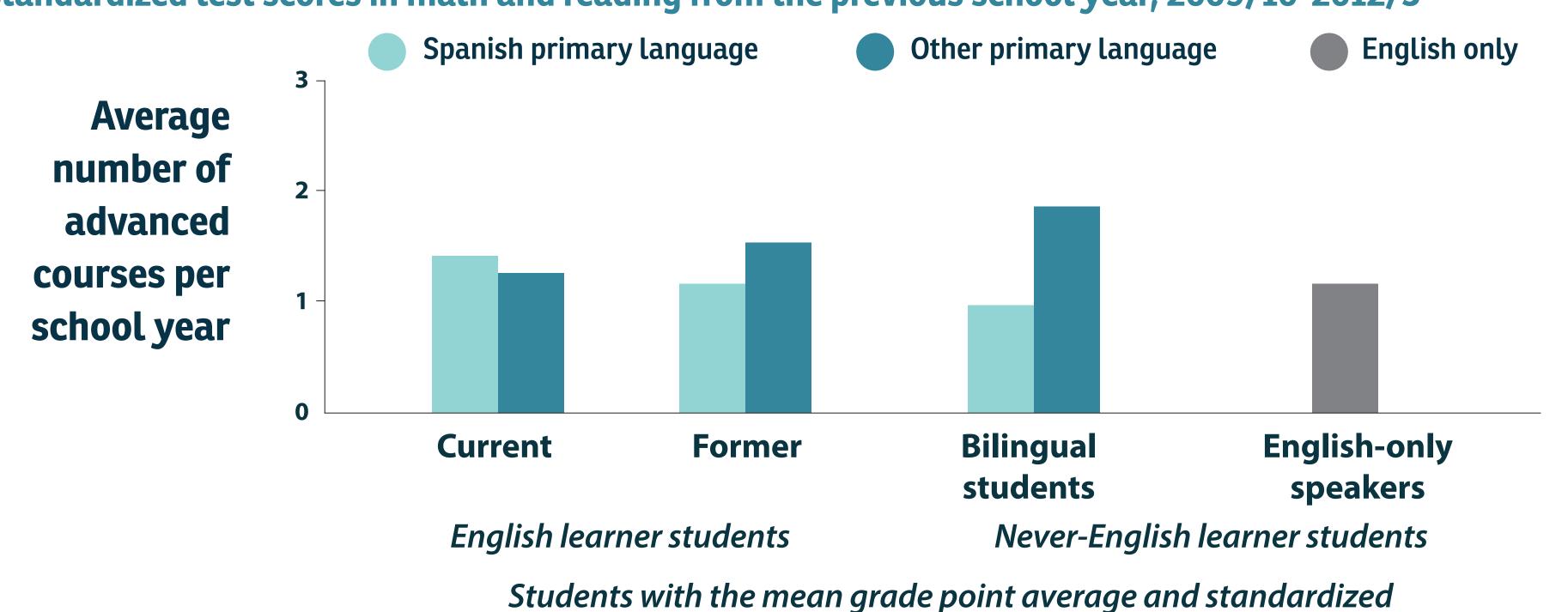
FINDINGS

- Spanish-speaking students, regardless of their English learner status, take fewer advanced courses than other language minority students and Englishonly speakers.
- Prior academic performance explains much of the difference in advanced course enrollment between Spanish-speaking students and English-only speakers, but it does not explain most gaps between other language minority students and English-only speakers.
- Spanish-speaking students earn lower grades in advanced courses than non– Spanish-speaking students, but the differences disappear when students have the same grade point average and state standardized test scores in math and reading from the previous year and attend the same school.
- Schools with the lowest percentages of Spanish-speaking students offer more advanced courses than schools with higher percentages of Spanish-speaking students.

Spanish-speaking students in Washington state high schools take fewer advanced courses per year than other language minority students with the same English learner status and English-only speakers, 2009/10-2012/3



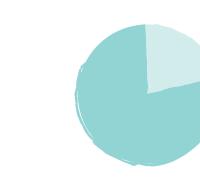
Language minority students in Washington state high schools take about as many or more advanced courses per year than English-only speakers when they have the same grade point average and state standardized test scores in math and reading from the previous school year, 2009/10-2012/3



test scores in math and reading from the previous school year

IMPLICATIONS

- Schools may benefit from monitoring the academic progress of students who speak different primary or home languages to identify groups that struggle more than others. Understanding the challenges particular students (such as Spanish speakers) face could help inform decisions about where to invest efforts to improve student achievement.
- Because prior academic performance can account for most of the differences between Spanish-speaking students and English-only speakers, advanced course enrollment rates could improve—especially for Spanish-speaking students—if efforts to accelerate their content mastery are successful. Accordingly, education stakeholders may want to review curriculum, instructional and assessment practices, and educators' professional development to identify areas for improving Spanish-speaking students' academic preparation for advanced coursework.
- Future research could identify school-level barriers to offering advanced courses to understand why schools with many Spanish-speaking students appear to have fewer opportunities for students to take advanced courses.



DATA DETAILS

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction provided data on more than 1 million students who were enrolled in Washington state public high schools between 2009/10 and 2012/13. The data included students' school and district enrollment, withdrawal date and reason, gender, race/ethnicity, grade level, English learner status, special education status, home and primary language, state standardized test scores in math and reading, and course transcripts. Students were divided into seven groups based on their English learner status and language spoken.



ANALYTIC METHODS

This study provides descriptive statistics about patterns in advanced course enrollment and performance among current and former English learner students, bilingual students, and never–English learner students. Research question 1 was addressed by calculating the average number of advanced courses taken per year for students in each English learner and language group. Research questions 2–4 were addressed using regression analysis to control for students' prior academic achievement, grade level, and school year (research questions 2–3) or school characteristics, including demographic composition, performance, and urbanicity (research question 4).



ENGLISH LEARNERS' TIME TO RECLASSIFICATION

How Much Do Student Characteristics Matter? by Malkeet Singh



BACKGROUND

Most research on time to proficiency for English learners has relied on their reclassification from current to former English learners. However, because every state has its own criteria for reclassification, it is difficult to compare results among states. Studies examining how long it takes English learners to learn English have produced estimates that range from three to seven years. In addition, research has shown that students' initial English language proficiency has a strong relationship to the time it takes them to reach proficiency—and that time to proficiency varies by home language and gender.

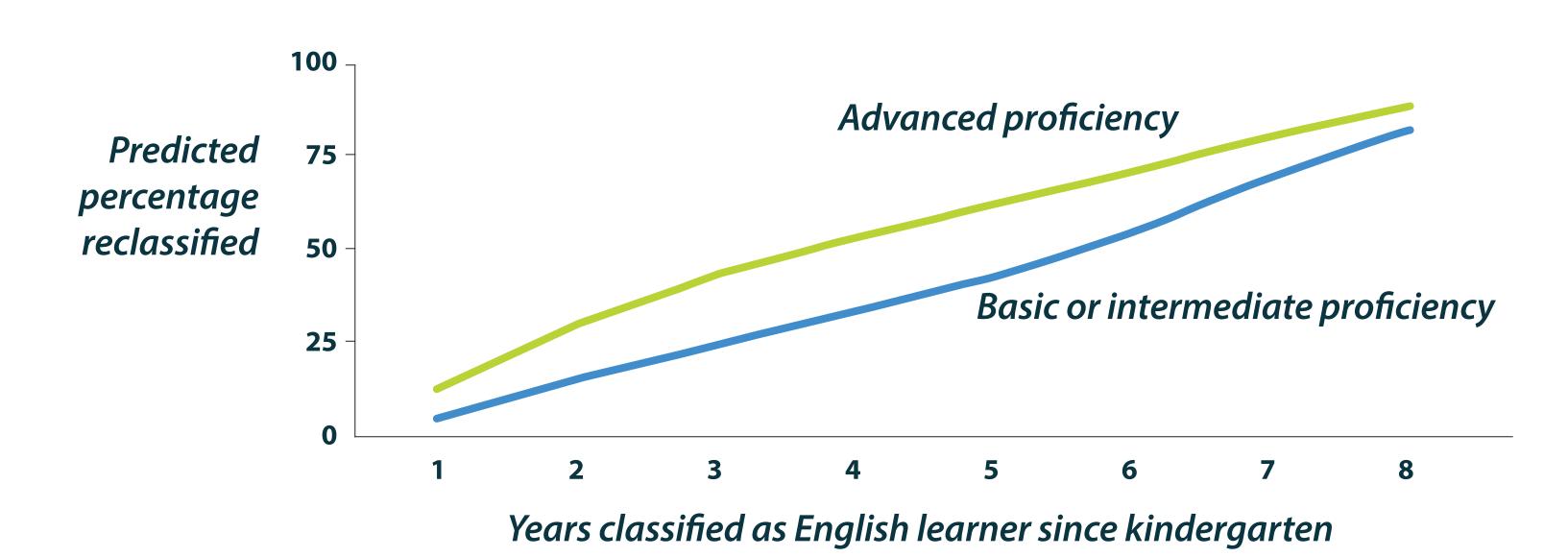
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1. How long does it typically take English learners to develop **English language proficiency?**
- 2. How does this time vary by student characteristics, such as English proficiency at entry to kindergarten, gender, and home language?

FINDINGS

Students who entered kindergarten as English learners took a median of 3.8 years to be reclassified. Students who entered with advanced English proficiency were more likely to be reclassified in their first eight years of school than students entering with beginning or intermediate proficiency. Students entering kindergarten with advanced English proficiency took a median of 3.0 years to be reclassified, and students entering with beginning or intermediate proficiency took a median of 4.4 years.

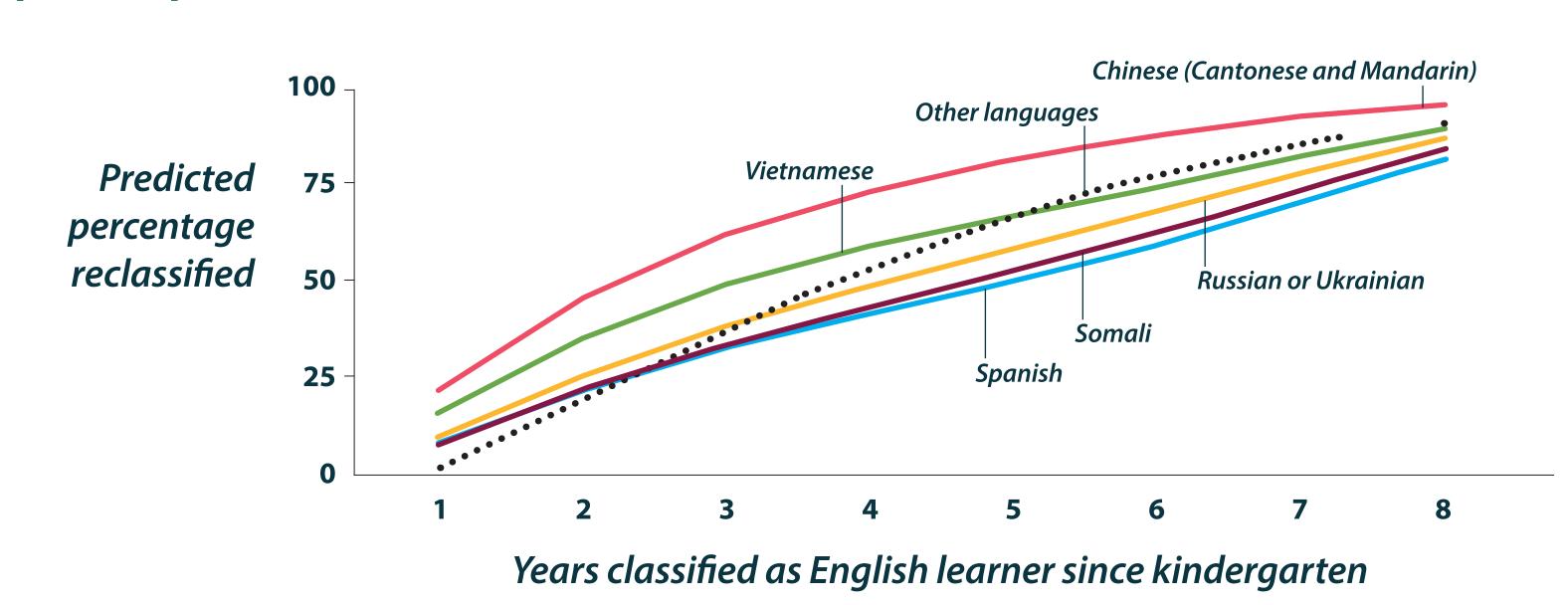
English learners entering kindergarten with advanced English proficiency are reclassified sooner than those entering with basic or intermediate English proficiency, 2005/06-2012/13



Female English learners were more likely than male English learners to be reclassified in their first eight years of school. Female English learners took a median of 3.6 years to be reclassified, and male English learners took a median of 4.1 years.

Regarding the five non-English home language groups most prevalent in the districts that were studied, Chinese speakers took the shortest median time to be reclassified (2.8 years), followed by speakers of Vietnamese (2.9 years), Russian or Ukrainian (3.2 years), Spanish (3.7 years), and Somali (3.9 years).

Chinese, Vietnamese, and Russian or Ukrainian speakers are reclassified sooner than Somali and Spanish speakers, 2005/06–2012/13





IMPLICATIONS

Knowing the average time to reclassification for English learners is important for educators because English proficiency is linked to academic success in the United States, and understanding how long it typically takes students to develop English proficiency provides educators with a measure of expected progress. This knowledge may also help educators identify programs and practices that facilitate or delay the development of English proficiency.



METHODS

The study focused on 16,957 current and former English learners who entered kindergarten in seven Road Map Project districts between 2005/06 and 2011/12. (The Road Map Project is a collective impact initiative in the South King County area of Washington state that aims to double the number of students who are on track to graduate from college or earn a career credential by 2020.) The study tracked the students' outcomes from their first year of kindergarten through 2012/13 using data from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's K-12 dataset, which includes data on program participation, assessment scores, and student-level demographic characteristics.

We used discrete-time survival analysis to estimate the time it took students to be reclassified, as well as the likelihood of reclassification in their first eight years of school. We also created a model using survival analysis to predict variation in time to reclassification according to students' English proficiency at entry to kindergarten, gender, and home language.



CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Interpreting Newcomers' Foreign Transcripts by Mary Martinez-Wenzl and Manuel Vazquez



ABSTRACT

Clear and consistent transcript evaluations are critical for newcomer English learners at the secondary level, who have limited time to master English and demonstrate proficiency in the academic subjects required for a high school diploma. A systematic review of newcomers' prior schooling is necessary to ensure they are placed at the appropriate level when they enroll. However, such reviews present two major challenges for schools and districts. First, it can be difficult to understand the course names. Second, even when course names are translated, it can be difficult to determine the content of each course, the grading process used, and how these factors relate to credits and course placement in the United States. This can result in students not receiving credit for coursework they have completed and being required to repeat courses. This, in turn, prolongs their time to high school graduation and lowers the likelihood that they will graduate at all.

This project involved seven districts in Washington state that participate in the Road Map Project. REL Northwest examined the intake process these districts use for newcomer English learners at the secondary level, focusing on how schools and districts interpret foreign transcripts. The project had three goals: Raise awareness of current foreign transcript policies and processes for newcomer English learners, provide resources for evaluating foreign transcripts, and increase school and district capacity to use and apply prior schooling data. The project culminated in a set of guidelines and resources for schools and districts to inform foreign transcript evaluation policies and processes.



DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

REL Northwest facilitated 14 discussions with Road Map district personnel. Participants included school counselors, registrars, district-level staff members, and state education agency administrators.

Discussions systematically examined three areas of foreign transcript evaluation: current processes and procedures; policy, credit, and equivalency issues; and opinions and needs. These data were used to construct a matrix of practices throughout the Road Map region and to identify school- and district-based recommendations for improving the foreign transcript evaluation process.

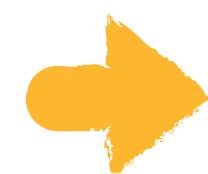
FINDINGS

The state education agency provides little guidance to districts on how to evaluate foreign transcripts. Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction policy explicitly states that there is no standard procedure for evaluating foreign transcripts, as the decision to accept credits should always be locally determined.

Road Map districts currently use one of two methods to evaluate foreign transcripts: a school-based approach or a centralized district-based approach. School-based approaches were the most prevalent in the Road Map region. Six of the seven districts used this approach, typically delegating the responsibility to a site-based counselor or registrar. Only one district in the Road Map region employed a centralized approach. In this district transcripts were analyzed at the district office.

There is considerable variation in the foreign transcript evaluation policies of the seven Road Map districts. District policies varied in several important areas, including:

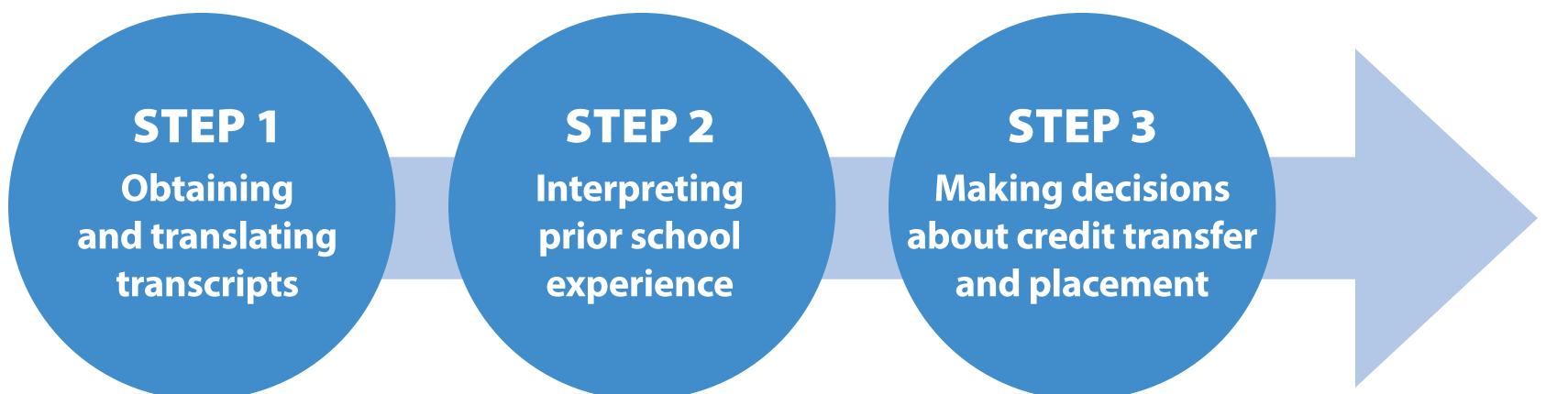
- Application of credits toward graduation: Some districts accepted transfer credits in core subject areas, while others applied them only toward electives.
- Initial grade placement: Some districts placed students based on their number of accepted credits, others based on age, and others used both factors. Newcomers were most commonly placed in grade 9, regardless of their transcript information.
- Translation requirement: Some districts required an English translation of each transcript, others did not.
- Time spent evaluating each transcript: Some districts reported spending one hour on each transcript, while others reported spending up to a month on the evaluation process.
- English proficiency: In some cases, credit transfer in core content areas depended on the students' levels of English proficiency; those who were proficient in English were able to transfer more credits than their peers with lower levels of English proficiency, regardless of the subject area. District policies on this issue varied significantly, however.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, REL Northwest developed a resource guide for the Road Map districts. The guide describes a three-step foreign transcript evaluation process, provides practical resources to address the most common challenges, and offers clear guidelines that can help schools and districts make the process more fair and consistent.

THREE-STEP PROCESS FOR EVALUATING FOREIGN TRANSCRIPTS



Practical resources for addressing common challenges

- Translation services, both free and fee-based
- Worksheets for constructing an academic history
- Resources for determining transcript authenticity
- Course name translations
- Features of authentic and fraudulent transcripts
- Information about international schooling systems
- Foreign credential evaluation services and fees
- District policy guidance on foreign transcript evaluation

Guidelines for creating a fair and consistent foreign transcript evaluation process

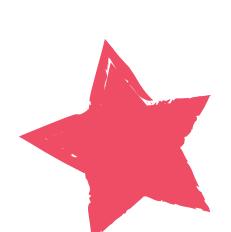
A district should have clear and explicit policies that answer each of the following questions:

- Who is responsible for the evaluation of foreign transcripts?
- What are the allowable substitutions and waivers, by subject area, for courses required for graduation?
- How are credits recorded on the cumulative record? Which course titles and numbers should be used?
- How and when are credits awarded for prior coursework in the absence of a transcript?
- What are the district's guidelines for converting grades to the 4.0 scale?
- How many credits will be allowed for each year of study outside the United States? Will there be any caps on allowable credits?
- How will the language of instruction impact credit transfer, if applicable? (For example, does a language arts class taken in a language other than English count for language arts credit, world language credit, or elective credit?)
- What role will exams play in the evaluation process? (For example, some districts, such as the Los Angeles Unified School District, require students to pass a locally developed final full-course exam to count credits in core content areas and to transfer in grades other than pass/no pass on their transcripts.)
- What is the process for students and their families to appeal the credit-awarding decisions made by the district?



ARE ENGLISH LEARNERS OVER- OR UNDERREPRESENTED IN SPECIAL EDUCATION?

It's Complicated by Monica Cox, Jason Greenberg Motamedi, and Jacob Williams



ABSTRACT

English learners and students with disabilities both need educational supports to succeed in school. However, the kinds of supports they need may differ. The first step to providing effective supports is accurately identifying students. Research shows that English earners are sometimes over- and under-identified for special education. Either way, these students are at risk of not receiving the right supports. This study compares the percentages of current and former English learners ("ever-English learners") in special education with the percentage of never-English learners in special education. It also compares the grades at which ever- and never-English learners are first identified for special education. The study found that overall, ever-English learners were as likely to be in special education as never-English learners; during the 2012/13 school year, 13 percent of both ever- and never-English learners were in special education. However, some groups of ever-English learners were under- or overrepresented in special education compared with never-English learners.

WHYTHIS STUDY?

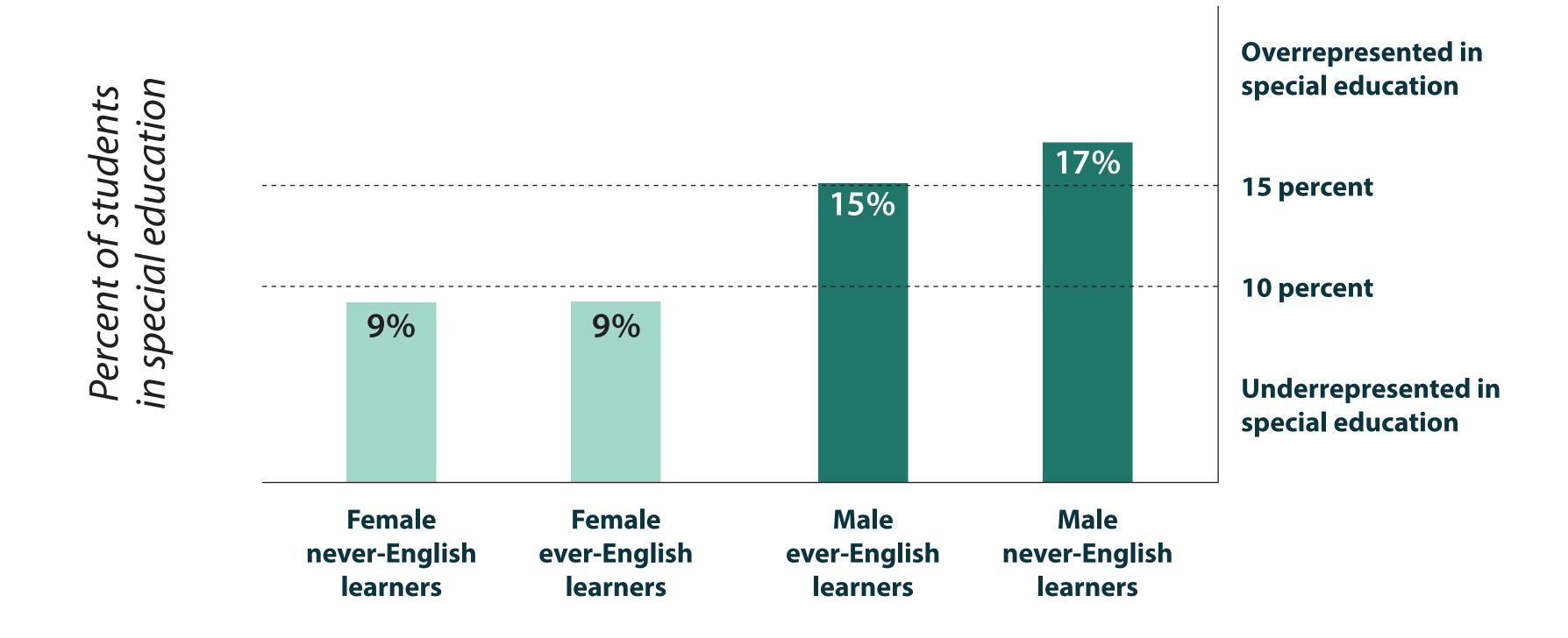
Because English learners are at risk of not receiving appropriate educational supports, researchers and practitioners need more information about the proportions of students identified in both categories. This study helped district leaders in Washington state determine whether English learners were disproportionately represented as eligible for special education. Results from the study helped these leaders begin to pinpoint patterns in over- and underidentification of English learners for special education services. This analysis served as the first step toward supporting the accurate identification of English learners who need special education services.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

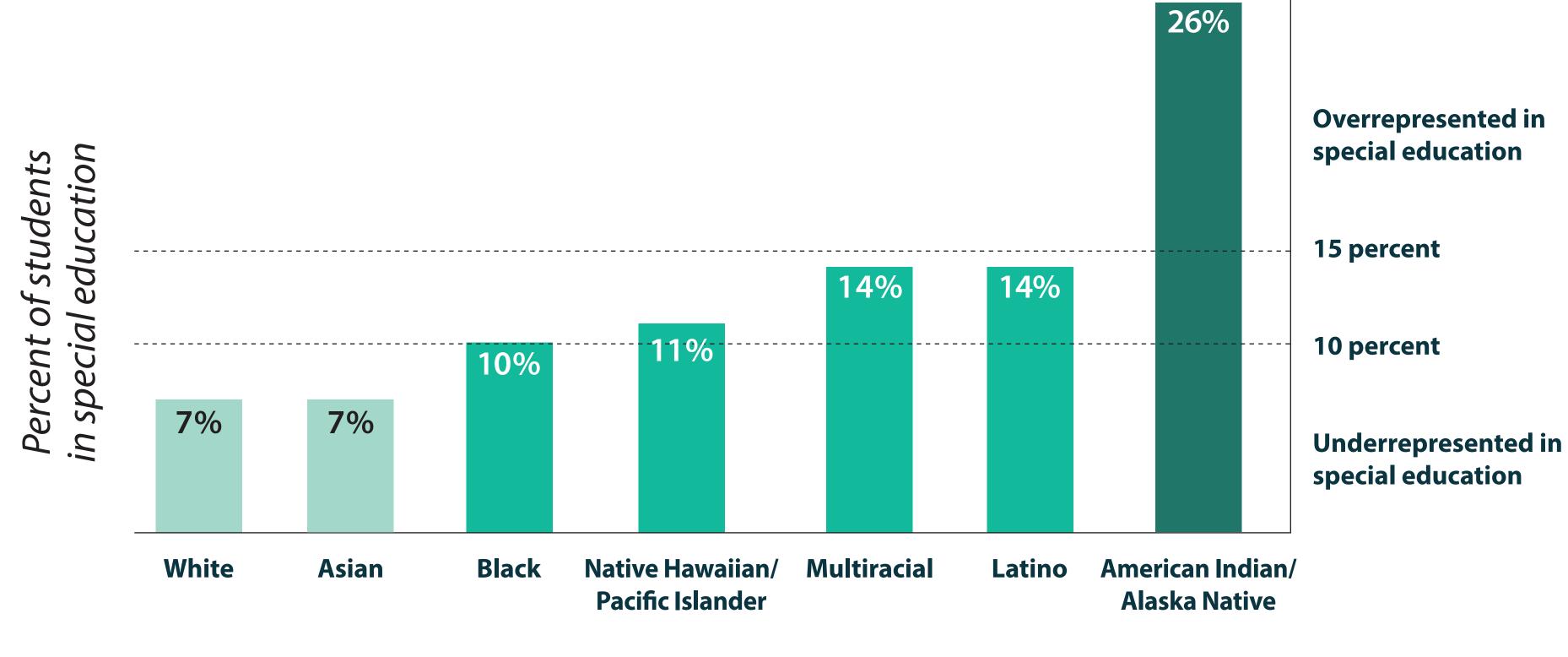
- 1. What percentage of ever-English learners are in special education compared with never-English learners?
- 2. In what grade are ever–English learners first identified for special education compared with never–English learners?

FINDINGS

Girls were underrepresented and boys were overrepresented in special education in Washington in 2012/13, regardless of English learner status

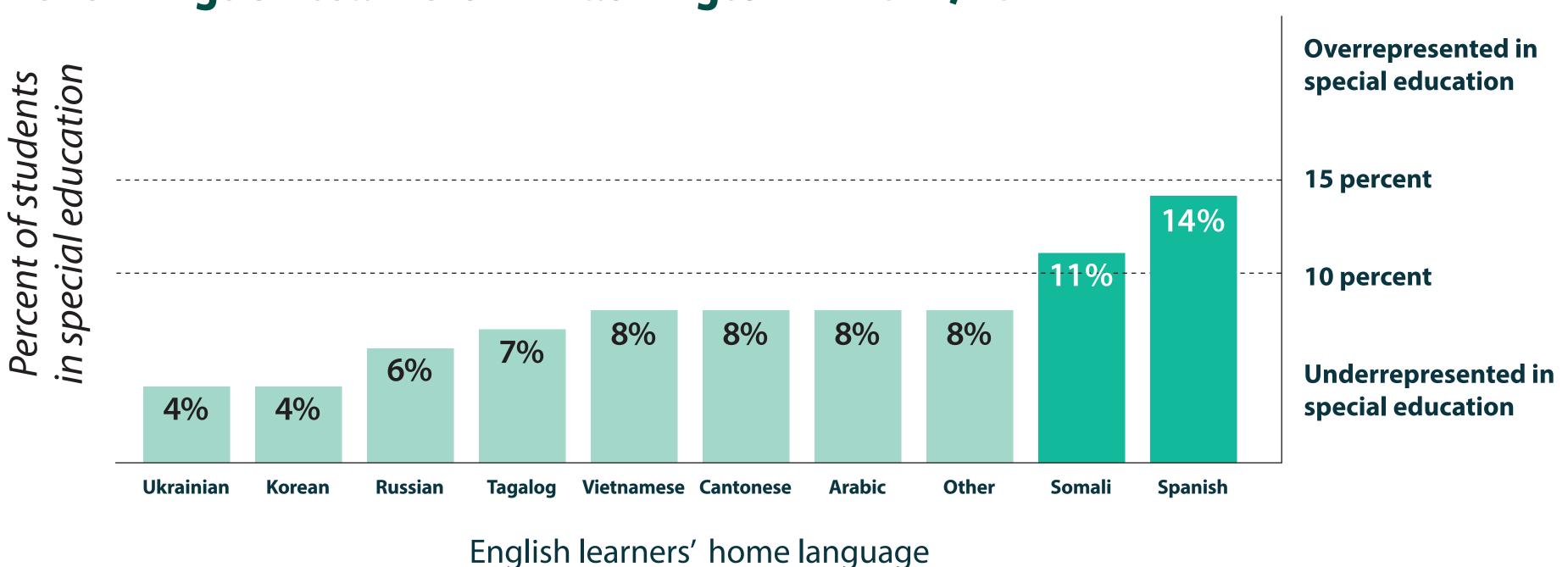


American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, and White English learners were disproportionately represented in special education compared with never-English learners in Washington in 2012/13



Ever-English learners' race and ethnicity

Ever-English learners who spoke home languages other than Somali or Spanish were underrepresented in special education compared with never-English learners in Washington in 2012/13

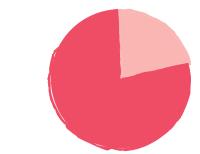




RESULTS

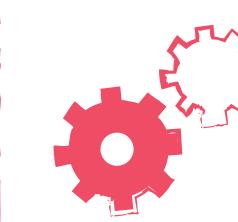
The study found that ever–English learners as a group were represented in special education at very similar percentages as never–English learners in Washington state (13 percent). However, disaggregation of the data revealed over- and underrepresentation for particular groups:

- Girls were underrepresented in special education and identified for special education in later grades than boys, regardless of their English learner status
- American Indian/Alaska Native ever–English learners were overrepresented in special education and identified in earlier grades than other never– and ever–English learners
- English learners who spoke home languages other than Somali or Spanish were underrepresented in special education compared with never-English learners



DATA SOURCE AND SAMPLE

This study used data from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction collected from 2009/10 to 2012/13 to calculate the percentage of ever–English learners in special education compared with never–English learners. This sample comprised 1,150,242 students who attended Washington public K–12 schools in 2012/13. A subset of the sample, the 2009/10 cohort, was used to calculate the grade at which students were first identified for special education. This subset consisted of 75,238 students who began kindergarten in Washington in 2009/10. Students who joined this cohort after kindergarten were excluded from the analysis.



METHODS

This study used descriptive statistics to compare percentages of ever–English learners in special education with never–English learners in special education, as well as disaggregate these data by grade level of identification and race/ethnicity.



GETTING IT RIGHT

Reference Guides for Registering Students with Non-English Names



ABSTRACT

Getting a student's name right is the first step in welcoming that student to school. In addition, accurately and consistently recording a student's name is important for tracking student data over time, matching files across datasets, and making meaning from the data. For students whose home language is not English, properly recording their information in a database built for English names can be more difficult. School staff members who register students may not be familiar with naming conventions in languages other than English.

PURPOSE AND GOALS OF THE PROJECT

This combined technical assistance and evidence event had two purposes. The first was to provide guidance on how data for students from non-English language backgrounds are entered into school, district, and state databases—which will improve the quality of those data and the ability of districts to track students over time—as well as match files across datasets and ultimately make meaning from the data. The second was to increase participants' knowledge of culturally appropriate ways to address parents and students, as well as provide participants with the background knowledge to ask appropriate questions for facilitating accurate data entry.



DATA SOURCES

There is no single source to which we can turn for information about all of the relevant languages. To obtain accurate information about naming conventions we began with a previously published work by our colleagues at REL Appalachia. We then consulted language experts, whom we contacted through a local refugee resettlement agency and community-based organizations. For each language, we asked the experts and native speakers to complete a naming conventions protocol, in which they explained and/or provided examples of the following:

- Alphabet and/or characters used
- Number of given names
- Number of family names
- Women's family name
- Order of names
- How to politely address parents
- Demographic differences
- Common transliteration practices

We also used information from Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), the Modern Language Association, Linguistics & Language Behavior Abstracts, and Google Scholar.

An external evaluator conducted cognitive testing (piloting) of the first drafts in five school districts outside of the region. Feedback was incorporated into the final drafts of the guides.

LANGUAGES

Arabic العَرَبِيَّة

Chinese 中文

Hindi हिन्दी

Korean 한국어

Russian русский язык

Somali Af-Soomaali

Spanish Español

Tagalog Tagalog

Ukrainian українська мова

ار دُو Urdu

Vietnamese Tiếng Việt

Let's take Spanish as an example—we found that children with Spanish names were often incorrectly entered into district and state databases. For instance, Genoveva Morales Tirado could be listed in a data set in at least three ways:

First	Middle	Last
Genoveva	Morales	Tirado
Genoveva		Morales Tirado
Genoveva	Tirado	Morales

^{*}The text highlighted in yellow is correct.

This means that if Genoveva moves from one school or district to another, she could have at least three ID numbers, and she might be assessed for English learner or special education services three times. In addition, she might lose some of the services she needs—and feel alienated because no one got her name right.

